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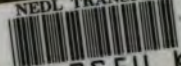
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JOHN MAIDMENT.

BY

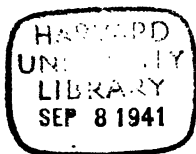
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# JOHN MAIDMENT.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE debating-room of the Oxford Union was unusually full. The great debate of the year was in progress ; it was a party question ; and the youthful champions of the two political parties were there in full force. All the long benches were filled with young men, tall and short, fat and thin, sallow most of them as studious youth are apt to be, with hair rather rough and with ragged remnants of undergraduate gowns upon their backs.

Most of the audience were reading men, for the Union was not a fashionable resort ; and the few who suggested idleness or dullness looked more like the lovers of beer and skittles than of hunting and champagne. Here and there in the rows of young faces, which showed the feeling of the moment, was the less simple countenance of some don, whom the fame of this great debate had drawn to the place. A little ashamed of being there, a little contemptuous of his

neighbors' seriousness, perhaps a little envious, the young dons prepared to listen to the contest of these tremendous politicians. And not only were the long benches on the floor of the House too full for comfort, but the light gallery, which ran all round the oval chamber, was packed with men, and even a few light gowns of ladies gave color to the scene. Above the gallery itself was more color, but sadly faint and faded, where from the upper wall the knights and damosels of decaying frescoes, the brief effect of young enthusiasm, looked down upon these living boys, who dreamed, some of them, that they would move the world.

Suddenly the babbling and scuffling were hushed, as the door of the chamber swung, and the dignified President in correct dress-clothes moved up between the facing benches to his high seat at the end. This end of the room was a little raised above the rest of the floor; on each side of the presidential chair boldly-curved green seats were fitted to the curved walls; and these seats were now filled to their utmost capacity by the committee-men and chief speakers, who had followed the President into the room.

The debate had been adjourned from the last meeting, and as everybody was eager to hear the brilliant young Radical who was to address the House first, there was no long delay in calling him to his feet.

With a whispered word to the friend at his side, John Maidment stepped quickly forward to the table, and faced the crowded House.

More than half the attraction of the great debate

was the expectation of a great speech from him, and he knew it. It was generally admitted not only that he was the orator of his contemporaries, but even that during many generations of copious rhetoric there had been no speaking at Oxford like the speaking of Maidment of Balliol. And now Maidment was to make his last speech in the Union, and he meant it to be his best. There was a worthy audience; there were more opponents than supporters, and he liked that; there was expectation in the air. The room was full of light, though a green shadow seemed to lie high up in the vaulted roof; the warmth of party strife was ready to break forth; the heat of young humanity was there already; the eager welcome died away, and in a profound silence Maidment began his speech.

The speech began, but it was not effective; something was wanting. It sounded fine and it seemed full of matter; but the listeners were not warmed so quickly as they had hoped to be. The orator's great intentions hampered him; he was too eager that this speech should be eminent—that it should surpass all his former efforts. He tried to lift it to a higher level; he felt himself comparatively ineffective, and, vexed by this recurrent feeling, he roused himself to eloquent passages, which seemed to end abruptly. It was just such an audience as he had wished, and yet he could not move them, as he had fancied himself moving them when he lay in bed that morning. Indeed, his audience were too considerate; for foes, as well as friends, were so eager to hear him and to give

him every chance of a final triumph, that he spoke at first in a silence which chilled him. Two streams of thought were his as he continued. Though his mind was busy with the making of sentences, it was busy, too, with questioning their effect. Would his next phrase warm them, and should he catch their warmth? As he spoke, he felt his hearers' disappointment, and his hottest words seemed to turn cold on the air. He was cold and cross, and every other moment he was ready to sit down, to curse himself for a fool, to admit that his great speech was a failure.

Indeed, John Maidment's last Oxford oration might have been little better than a failure had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

Among the little things which irritated the young speaker, as he labored with his task, was the presence of a small number of undergraduates, who differed widely from the rest of the audience. They had a sporting look, and their clothes were both better and brighter; it was their first visit to the Union. John knew some of them, and it annoyed him to think that they had dined together, and had come to hear him as a novelty, as a few nights before they had waited on a music-hall singer. His eyes met theirs again and again, and each time a slight irritation followed. Their behavior was harmless and they seemed attentive; but John fancied an air of superiority. As he stood looking down the long chamber, they faced him from the gallery opposite; he could not ignore them; their presence was another cause of discomfort and annoyance. Yet from these young men came help.

For some time they listened with becoming gravity ; but, as they became accustomed to this new atmosphere of debate and began to gain some notion of the speaker's meaning, the more intelligent felt first a growing amazement, then a quick rush of indignation. They had known, when they came to hear him, that Maidment was a Radical—"an awful Radical," they had called him ; some of them had thought it strange that he did not prefer their society to that of men who seemed to them only half shaved and dingly dressed. But, for all their preparation, this radicalism of a man who had been at school with some of them seemed, when it actually assailed their ears, unworthy and outrageous. It seemed impossible to stand still opposite to a fellow who talked like that, and not utter a protest.

On the other hand, John Maidment's utterances were cruder and more subversive than usual ; for in his efforts to warm himself and his hearers he flung them out with uncomfortable emphasis and vehemence. From the dull level of his speech he broke abruptly into short phrases of denunciation, with which he hoped to excite himself ; and these poor phrases assumed an unnatural distinctness. More and more the young orator felt the ineffectiveness of his speech, and his eye full of vexation rising to the group of smart young men read in their simple faces condemnation of his extravagance.

Who were they, that they should condemn him, these idlers and careless Sybarites ? These were the men with whom, if he had chosen the primrose path,

he would have spent his time at Oxford. Whenever he had felt brief desire of their soft luxurious life, of cricket in summer and hunting in winter, of late rising and long lunching, contempt of his own weakness had turned in an instant to bitter scorn of their idleness and uselessness. And now they had come here for absolute vacancy in the hour which should have been the hour of his triumph to witness his failure ; their prosperous air, the look as of men who had dined well, was a final aggravation. His eyes sought theirs as he launched his most acrid sentence, and across the long space he seemed to read in their boyish faces disapproval and derision.

As he looked, something more extravagant than he had yet said came to him in an instant, and, as he gave it utterance, he was full of the wild wish to see how they would like that. They did not like it at all. The leader of their set cried out in mockery, and his friends followed with loud murmurs.

The habitual Conservatives of the place seemed only to have waited for a lead, and the voice of the young orator was drowned by a dull roll of dissenting voices. In an instant the color leaped to John Maidment's cheek ; he felt real hot anger well up from within him ; his cold fits were gone. As the murmurs died away, indignant words came thronging to his lips ; he was glad in the midst of his wrath ; he was conscious that the something needful had come to him. His thoughts no longer went wandering here and there ; there was no divided stream ; with

fury and exultation he launched himself on the full current of his speech.

And now John Maidment was like a young prophet in the tents of the ungodly. His eyes shone; he saw in these genial young men who had dined at the Mitre the essence of all that was wrong with the whole nation, with the world; he burned to pulverize them. His denunciation of the idle and luxurious, who, lolling at ease on divine couches, moved with a nod resistance to all true reforms, was like a personal attack; it was lucky that these young Britons had gained from race and a hearty out-of-door life a rare fund of defensive stolidity. The dull speech blazed into brilliancy; fierce indignation made it almost poetical. Murmurs of warm applause answered the murmurs of objection; the real old party fires burnt once more in these young specimens of the eternal parties. The atmosphere was thrilled with the quick ebb and flow of opposing passions, and John's voice was like a trumpet in his own ears. It was a splendid burst of denunciation.

When the young Radical paused after the fury of his onslaught, the Liberal party broke into exclamations of delight. They were quickly moved to rapture, and this brilliant hero appealed to both ears and eyes. As he stood alert by the table, unable yet to speak for the tumult of applause, flushed and radiant and bold, he was as full of beauty as of the nervous energy of the time. With his head held high and his eyes shining he waited till the sounds passed; and then, with a fine rhetorical instinct, he began to speak



in a new mood. His face changed like the face of a consummate actor. He felt the sympathy of the friends around him and their generous admiration ; he yielded himself to the charm ; indignation had passed, and the fair hope of the future held him. His words seemed for his own delight to clothe his thoughts with beauty ; he almost tasted them ; he seemed to be listening to somebody else's speech, and enjoying it very much. He was content with himself. A few minutes before he had been saying to himself with bitterness that he was no better than other people ; now a beguiling voice seemed to whisper to him that he was indeed set apart from the common crowd. He knew that after his great burst of denunciation he must not long delay the end. Very gently he began to speak, and they all were very still to hear.

“ But, why should we be angry ? ” he said. “ Is not the future ours ? We may smile on our opponents, for to them is the strife without hope, to us the star of victory ; to them the clouds of darkness, to us the splendor of the dawn. The day is at hand. We who are but starting on the high path of life, brothers in heart and hope, we shall live to see the glorious days when a free people in a free land, sole masters one and all of the dear soil on which we live, sole masters one and all of the destiny of our fair Fatherland—the glorious days when we, a nobler and a juster people in the eyes of God and man, shall put our veto on all aggressive war, on all unequal burdens, on all unequal laws. Yes, we shall live to see it. Do

we not see it now? Look to the East, for from thence cometh the morning; nay, look to the West, for from thence cometh the morning to the nations. Liberty is good, and we shall be free beyond the dreams of freedom. Equality shall cease to be a mockery, as when the rich alone are rich enough to seek justice. Only the good and the wise shall be held worthy of honor, only the wise and the good and the dignity of daily labor. And more than liberty, more than equality, brotherhood, a living brotherhood shall be ours. Aye, and a brotherhood like ours shall be for the nations too. Nation shall be as brother to nation, all together with mutual help and love working out the divine purpose in the world. The day dawns, my brothers, if you will but see. Speaking here for the last time --"

Here the voice of the speaker seemed to break, and a deep murmur of sympathy rose from all sides; as it ceased he said:

"I will say no more. Let my last words in this place be, 'Have faith, my brothers.'"

Before the last words were spoken, some had risen from their seats; young blood was on fire, and the unstinted admiration of youth; it seemed an amazing thing that one of themselves should speak so eloquently, with a manner so faultless and a voice so beautiful.

When John sat down, there was such tumultuous applause, that the dignified young President grew anxious for the dignity of the House. It seemed as if the wilder and more revolutionary youth would toss

the orator to their shoulders, as if he were no more than the winner of a boy's race at school. There was nothing but applause ; the Conservative majority made no counter-demonstration. Even the most sullen of these young opponents felt that there was nobility in the young Radical's errors ; even the most cynical of the few dons present, though he smiled grimly over a boy's broadcast sowing of political wild oats, turned in the doorway for another glance at this brilliant creature, illumined by youth, by genius, and by faith. As John sank down in his seat, his friend Paul grasped his hand and wrung it hard, for he could not speak. John was supremely happy. Even the young men who had roused his wrath, the Sybarites in check shooting-coats, were pleasant in his eyes. He was intoxicated with his triumph ; he was exquisitely conscious of his power ; he was pleased with himself. As he felt Paul's honest hand grasp his, he had a final exquisite sensation of delight in this loyal, unquestioning friendship. Pressing his friend's hand with his strong, nervous fingers, he felt sure of his power over men, sure that he was a leader of men, that with his gifts he might go anywhere. And he meant to go far. He was very ambitious.

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## CHAPTER II.

PAUL BRENT was slow of speech. Moved in all his heart—and it was a very big one—by the triumph of his friend, he could only express his feelings by grasping his hand. It is true that he opened his mouth, but, if any word came forth with difficulty, it was too short and too deep to reach even John's ear, and it did little indeed to swell the clamor of applause. And yet, if all the enthusiasm which John Maidment's speech excited could have been weighed there and then, the joy of Paul Brent in his friend's triumph would have been found greater than that of all the tumultuous youth together. His was a great unquestioning admiration, which had grown slowly with his growth from the day of his first meeting with his friend, when they were both small boys—a belief, which had gained strength with every day, entwining itself with all his habits of slow, careful thinking, and blending itself with the strong, silent currents of his deepest feelings. He had been charmed by those qualities in his friend which were least like his own: the quickness of understanding, the readiness of speech. From the first, John had seemed to him a shining person in body as in mind. John had seen great, amazing truths at a glance, and Paul had stared and stared till he had acquired a clear view of them. John had swallowed great principles, which were to transform himself, and through him the

world, and Paul had gulped them down with faith. There was no limit to the gratitude, of which he could not express a thousandth part. He believed that this friend, who had been brought to him in boyhood by a sort of happy chance, had freed his eyes from bandages of prejudice and error, and had shown him the world as it might be, and as even he might help to make it—a world of higher aims and purer lights, a world of brothers, a world approaching perfection in all its parts by virtue of a universal panacea which was called Democracy. He believed that John had taught him how to live.

John on his side had no idea of the strength of Paul's feeling for him. Indeed, he often laughed at him for his cold temperament, and for the faintness of the flush which came to his cheek in times of the greatest excitement. Of course he knew that he had great influence with him, had had great influence from the first. He did not think much about it; it seemed only natural. It was obvious that he should lead and Paul should follow.

As Paul traveled down from Oxford, a few days after John's great speech at the Union, he wished many times, as he had often wished before, that he had told his friend how grateful he was. His eyes rested rather vaguely on the familiar scene, where the easy sloping hills stand back from the valley garden of the Thames; and as he thought of his friend, and that their college days were ended as their school days had ended, there was a mist on the river, though its morning mist had vanished long ago. Later, when

he had passed through London, and the pastures and hop-gardens and wheat-fields were gliding past his window, the same wish came back to him again and again. He told himself, not for the first time, that there must be something wrong with him, since he could not plainly and frankly tell his friend how well he knew the vastness of the debt which he owed him. He set his teeth and nodded his head slightly, as he made up his mind that once for all he would tell what he felt to John when he joined him at Brentholme.

And now the train was drawing near to the familiar station, and Paul could get a distant view of his native village, straggling loosely up the hill to the open gates of his father's place.

: This so-called borough was probably the most insignificant place in England which sent a representative to Parliament; and the choice of the representative depended on the will of the present owner of Brentholme as absolutely as it had depended on the will of the most arbitrary of his ancestors. The place had descended for many generations from father to son, and the eldest son of each alternate generation had gone into Parliament as a matter of course. Every eldest son wished to go into the army, but it was only the Brent who had grown weary of sitting grim and silent in the House of Commons while talk ran jerkily on, who allowed his eldest son to become a soldier. Paul's grandfather had been a member; his father had been in the army till he became a colonel. It was therefore fixed as the Pyramids that Paul should enter the House.

And now his time had come. He had finished his Oxford life with credit ; and his next duty was to go through the form of being elected by the friendly electors, who had known him in his perambulator, and who would have chosen him at first sight, perambulator and all, if Colonel Brent had suggested it. And now everything was ready. The worthy gentleman who had contentedly acted as seat-warmer was ready to go ; and Paul was to occupy his place, and was not sorry that it must be so. Indeed, the education which daily intercourse with John Maidment had given him made him profoundly glad, first of all Brents, that even by dumb voting he could help bring in the golden time. He was profoundly glad, and profoundly grateful to John.

As he looked at the straggling, unpretending pleasant village, it struck him even more sharply than usual how unfair it was that such a place should have the glory of a representative, and what a greater shame it was that, while it continued to enjoy this honor, its representative should not be John. How wrong it was that he, the tongue-tied, should walk into Parliament with his hands in his pockets, and that his friend, the brilliant and the eloquent, should have to chew his burning thoughts in silence ! Glad as he was of the career before him, he would not have hesitated for a moment to give up his chance to John, if it had been in his power to give it up. But Paul knew, and John knew too, that Colonel Brent was not to be persuaded to change his plans.

The Colonel made few plans, but those he made

without help, and he did not discuss them. Brought up very strictly by the last Parliamentary Brent, he allowed his children a perhaps excessive freedom in everyday matters; but at certain epochs they found duties awaiting them, and for escape from these not all the arguments of all the advocates would avail. It had long been settled that Paul, as soon as he had done with Oxford, should go into Parliament.

It seemed to Paul that there was still a good deal of unfairness in the world. There was this ridiculous little rotten borough, and he, the wrong man, was bound to represent it; and, when he had become its representative, he must help to deprive it of representation. It never occurred to him for a moment that he need not join as heartily in the suppression of this little family iniquity as in that of all the other iniquities which they were to smash in the good time coming. He was a very simple soul. He wondered how his father, stanch old Whig with inconsistent peculiarities, would like the changes. He thought that they would come very quickly. He thought himself weak for hoping that the glorious improvements would not include the cutting up of Brentholme into cabbage-gardens in his father's day. If he were ever allowed to inherit the place, and if the new lights made it clear that cabbages were right, he would stick in the first spade, though it would scar his heart too. He had a deep love for Brentholme.

And now the train stopped at the station, and Paul stepped out quickly, for there on the platform was his sister, his only sister and fast friend. Nobody



else got out at that quiet place, and when the train moved on again, Letty, unmindful of the porter, who was an old family friend, put her arms round Paul's neck and would not let him go. She laughed and almost cried, and could hardly keep her feet from dancing. She had to stand a-tiptoe to embrace her long-legged brother, and he put on a fine blush as she kissed him before the admiring friend who was arranging his luggage on the truck. He unclasped her hands by force, and held her away that he might look at her.

She was a pleasant sight. There was the fair skin of the family, though it was not free from freckles, and there were the family blue eyes; but the little nose was the very opposite of the Brent aquiline, and nose and mouth and chin seemed to hint a slight willfulness which was unlike the Brent severity. She seemed to be still a child though old enough to be a woman, to be all compact of wholesome country air and country thoughts and simple ways of life. She laughed under Paul's eyes, and her dimples were very pretty. She insisted on holding his hands as they went up the drowsy street, wherein there were but two or three friendly folk to give them greeting, and through the big park-gates, which all day long stood open to the village. It was a sign of a long-established friendship. The little Brents made themselves at home in their neighbors' houses, and were aware of the birth of every puppy in the place; and in turn they brought the school-children from the dusty road into the spacious playground of the park.

Very near to its open gates stands the old square house, square and solid as the family itself, with its trim flower-beds about it (the Colonel had a very orderly taste in flowers); but beyond it the park stretches far away its wide and generous spaces. It would give small encouragement to the reforming spade, for there is very little earth above the chalk. It can not be called well timbered, for it is only in the deepest hollows that the elms and beeches have grown large, while on the upland slopes small clumps seem to cling for life, and on the highest places the stunted shrubs grow streaming with a driving wind. Its beauty is the beauty of wide spaces and open breezy life, of springy turf and lovely line. The slopes melt into hollows and the hollows swell into hills with the grace of following waves; and so the land spreads far and free till it slips under the furthest park paling, and is far-reaching open down; and the downs stretch forward their long majestic curves till they are broken into high chalk walls by the buffets of the rolling sea.

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### CHAPTER III.

ON the morning after his son's return from Oxford, Colonel Brent was pacing up and down his den. The Turkey carpet, which had lasted long, showed a marked line where the Colonel was wont to walk backward and forward for the assistance of the somewhat slow process of thought. In the pleasant morn-

ing light, which came freely in at the bow-window, everything in the room looked old as the carpet. The red curtains, which were pulled tight back, were faded. There was a stiff high-backed leathern arm-chair, the seat of which was hollowed by long occupation; and there was a roomy leathern sofa, with a mattress not much thicker than a board. Between these well-worn articles of furniture was a wide grate with high old-fashioned mantel-piece; on the mantel-piece were a few pipes, a tobacco-jar, a super-annuated powder-flask, and a dog-whistle; and above these hung a map of the county yellowed by age. There was nothing in the room, except a pipe or two and the later numbers of "Baily's Magazine," which the Colonel's father would not have recognized at a glance. The present owner looked thoroughly at home in his den. He had an air as old-fashioned as his furniture, and his back was stiffer than that of his chair. He looked tall and strong, but he did not carry his strength easily; he had a peculiar air of being hampered by his muscles. Of course, his eyes were clearly blue, and his hair thick and fair. His skin, but for its summer tan, might have been envied by the fairest Saxon girl; and an abundant golden beard covered his square chin and massive throat.

When the Colonel had taken but a few turns on his familiar track the door opened and Paul came in. He had been for an early ride about the park; he looked longer in the leg than usual in his breeches and gaiters, and his face had a rosier color. As he had felt his favorite animal leap under him with a

treble portion of the springiness of the short turf, and had met the fresh rush of the air as he galloped against it, he had said in his heart that he was a very lucky young man. His life lay plain before him, and it seemed very good.

The Colonel stopped in his walking, and father and son, equal in height, looked straight at each other. After a minute the Colonel began—

“About this—” he said in his deep voice, and stopped.

Paul nodded gravely.

“This going into Parliament,” said the Colonel, as if he finished his sentence with an effort.

Paul nodded again.

“Johnson wants to come out.”

Paul nodded.

“Are you ready to go in?”

“Yes,” said Paul.

Then there was a pause. The Colonel could not speak without putting his chin up first. On this occasion he put his chin well up and opened his mouth, as if he were going to say something momentous, and then he shut his mouth with no word spoken. His son waited patiently, being accustomed to the thought that speech was a difficulty. At last the father spoke a trifle lower than usual.

“You must not vote for any lowering of the franchise,” he said.

“What?”

“It’s gone far enough. I can’t have old Treddles voting.”

"You can't help it," said Paul, who was beginning to understand the force of his father's words.

His father waited a minute, and then, with his chin very much up and a faint flush on his cheekbones, he said—

"I can help your having a hand in it."

After this there was a longer pause.

"You mean," said Paul at last, and rather huskily, "that I am not to go into Parliament."

"If you don't promise."

"If it isn't right that the people should vote, the whole thing is—is bosh."

On this the Colonel made no comment either by voice or gesture. He stood firmly planted before the empty grate, with the old county map above his head, an embodiment of all the decision of all the Brents.

"I believe in it," said Paul with equal decision; "and so I must do all I can to help it."

The Colonel hereupon opened his mouth as if again he were about to say something of importance, and this time from the depth of his chest issued a single deep note, or grunt, which might have meant anything. It probably meant that he did not intend to discuss the question, but waited to hear whether his son would give the promise or not.

"I can't promise," said Paul shortly.

His father said nothing, but looked at him steadily.

"Then I am not to stand for—" Paul finished his sentence by a nod toward the family borough.

"No," said the Colonel.

Paul stood a moment looking down at the point

of his boot ; then he turned to the door, and when he had opened it he said, with an obvious effort—

“I am sorry not to do what you ask.”

“Ah !” said his father, with the upward movement of the head.

This deep, brief answer meant that he was sorry for the fact, and that further speech was useless ; and Paul, being a Brent, understood it, and accepted it as conciliatory.

Colonel Brent, when his son had left him, stood in the same place, and in the same attitude. He was not half so much surprised as his son, for he had long arrived at the conclusion that Paul had views, probably young men’s folly, unlike his own. Though not a sign of it appeared in his face, he was very sorry for his boy. He was proud of him too, for he had taken his disappointment like a man—like a Brent.

“How like the boy is to my father !” he said to himself, with a softening of the heart.

If the Colonel had been in the habit of thinking of himself, he might have said—

“How like he is to me !”

He was not only proud of his son, but even a little envious. At the bottom of his heart he envied this chance of taking a knock-down blow so pluckily. There was a great deal of stoicism in the family, and many of its members had felt a highly rarefied pleasure in enduring without a word the buffets of fortune. The Colonel did not sit down to examine his thoughts nor to nurse his feelings. He had decided some time before what the next step should be, if Paul refused

to promise. Paul had refused ; and the Colonel, after standing silent for a few minutes, put on his hat and walked at his usual pace to the post-office.

Paul took his disappointment well, but he showed more emotion than his father. To him it was a complete surprise, and he was a little staggered. An hour ago he had seen his life fairly arranged before him, and his life's work ready to his hand. Now he did not know what he was to do. As this was a state of mind which was always unbearable to him, he began to consider at once what his first step should be. He could not rest till he had made some plan of action ; and so to assist the process, and only waiting a minute to unbuckle his spurs, he strode away to tramp and think. He walked more quickly than usual, and at first his lips were very tightly pressed together ; and so it may be fairly said that he showed more emotion than his father.

But, walk as fast and far as he would, Paul could not decide on his first step. He thought that he must get away from home for a while, but he was not sure that this was not mere weakness. He thought that it would be good for him as a Democrat to visit America, but he was not sure that this was anything more than a wish for indulgence. However, the exercise had parted his lips and brought him to his normal pace, and he seemed calm as usual when he came back from his walk and found Letty on the terrace. When he saw his sister, it struck him that she would be hurt if she heard the news from anybody but him, and, as

he hated to hurt Letty, he determined to tell her. He used the fewest words.

"Not going into Parliament?" she cried out.

"No," he said.

"Won't the father give it you? What a shame!" she said, hotly—"oh, Paul, what a shame!"

"He's right—from his point of view."

"But why? How can he be right? Why won't he let you go in?"

"He asked me not to vote for lowering the franchise."

"And you wouldn't?" Her whole face changed. "O Paul! Such a little thing!"

"It's big," he said after a minute; "it's at the bottom of the whole thing."

"Oh, but, Paul, to please the father! Can't you really promise him that?"

She put her two hands up to his shoulders, and her sweet upturned face was full of entreaty.

Her brother set his lips again, wishing that he could explain. After a pause of consideration he said:

"A man in Parliament, who believes in democracy and don't do all he can to give the people votes, is"—he looked about for a word—"is a sneak."

This effort did not seem to have the required effect, for Letty still looked at him with doubt and entreaty.

"I think you ought to be ready to give up something to the father," she said.

"But this is everything. Ask John when he comes. He will show you. He can make it clear."



As he spoke of John, he determined to write to him. This was the very first thing to do. He even thought, that being so much moved, he would be able to express himself more warmly to his friend, and so some little good might come out of this evil chance.

"I can't help it," he said, and he squeezed his sister's little hands rather tightly. Then he went and shut himself in his bedroom, that he might write his letter.

"Dear old man," he wrote, and then he stopped.

This was an affectionate style of beginning a letter which he had never used before. He blushed; he thought the words looked gushing; but there they were, written, and they should go:

"DEAR OLD MAN: I am not to go into Parliament. The father won't have it. He wanted me to promise not to vote for extending the franchise. Of course I could not promise; and so I am out of it. I don't like it. I have told nobody but Letty; and she thinks me wrong. She does not understand. You will understand. I wish I could make you know that I know what I owe you. You have made me see things straight, and what one may do, and what one may not. When can you get away from Oxford? We shall all be—glad when you come here.

"Yours ever,

"PAUL BRENT."

He blushed again as he wrote, "Yours ever"; it looked like the ending of a romantic school-girl; but he let it stand.

## CHAPTER IV.

By the afternoon post of the next day Paul received a letter, and recognized with a secret thrill the writing of John Maidment. Holding it unopened in his hand, he considered it till he had grasped the fact that it must have been written before John had received his letter of the day before. He smiled at the thought that while he was reading John's letter about everyday matters John might be crying out with amazement over the news of his disappointment. Smiling, he opened the letter and began to read ; but in a moment the smile had gone from his lips.

“MY DEAR PAUL”—John wrote—“how shall I ever thank you ? When I read your father's telegram offering me the seat, I knew in a moment what you had done. Paul, my dear friend, yours is a heart of gold. There is not one man in ten thousand who would forego such a chance for the sake of a friend. But you must pause and think. It seems absurd to write this to you, who are always pausing and thinking. I know you must have thought this thing through and through before you decided that I should go before you into Parliament. Anyway, I shan't be really happy till we are both there, and working together again, as we worked for the schools. If you don't repent your sacrifice even a little bit I can't refuse it. I am so sure that there is my proper work—the work which I can do best. There can not be a

doubt of that. If I am good for anything, I am good for speaking. It would be unpardonable in me to refuse a chance of going into Parliament. My obvious sphere of duty is in Parliament. I am so glad that there can't be a shadow of doubt about that, for your father put a thing in his telegram which might have made me pause if I had not been so absolutely sure what I ought to do. He offered me the seat on condition that I would not vote for lowering the franchise. Of course I shall try to argue him out of that. Anyway, it is of course wholly different from promising to vote against it—that I could not have promised. But the mere absence of a single voter can make no difference; the odds are incalculably great. It would be simply preposterous for anybody to allow such a thing to keep him from a career in which he sees clearly his only real path of usefulness. It would be madness. Oh, my dear Paul, how can I thank you? I have written all this as if it was settled; but you must not give up this thing to me, if you have the least doubt or regret. Write to me at once, and tell me. Be sure that, if you draw back, I shall never blame you. Only write and tell me all about it, or I shall come flying home at once. I can do nothing till I am sure.

Yours ever,

“JOHN MAIDMENT.”

Paul shut himself up with John's letter. He could not bear to speak of it to anybody. He read it through again deliberately; he examined it sentence by sentence; he could find no comfort in it. He was

sure that his friend was wrong, and this was a great shock, for never before had he realized that in any matter of any importance John Maidment could be wrong. It was a shock to the foundations of all his usual thoughts and feelings ; but yet he was sure that his friend was wrong. Moreover, as he patiently examined the letter, he arrived gradually at the conclusion that his friend more than half suspected that he was wrong. He noted all the expressions of certainty : "I am so sure." "There can not be a doubt." "I am so glad that there can't be a shadow of doubt." "It would be simply preposterous," John had written, "to be turned from a useful career by such a trifle ; it would be madness." Paul had no doubt : his friend was wrong, and his friend's conscience was uneasy. He wished with all his heart that he had been with him.

What a revolution in himself was implied by this wish he did not stop to ask. He felt the discomfort of the shock, but he did not think about it. All his thoughts were for John, and as he thought about him he was filled with pity. The brilliant creature, who might have grown great, was beginning with a mistake ; the young man full of noble aspirations was yielding to the first temptation ; the politician, who had thrilled his hearers with visions of political purity, was to pay his principles for the very start in the race. It was pitiful. Paul wished with all his heart that he had been near to strengthen him in the hour of temptation. It was no use indulging in such wishes. What could he do now ? He decided that he could

do nothing yet. He must wait and see how his letter, which had crossed this ill-omened epistle on the road, would affect John Maidment. It was impossible that John could consent to be less scrupulous than he, who had always looked to him for guidance. Poor John ! Paul foresaw that it would be bitter for his friend to know that another had been firmer under temptation ; but that was a small matter, if only it might save him from beginning life with a fatal mistake. He must wait and see how his friend would answer his letter, and he hoped with all his heart that the answer would include a refusal of the Colonel's offer.

Paul had not long to wait. The post of the next day brought John's second letter. It was not long :

"DEAR PAUL : Burn my letter of yesterday, and forget that I wrote it. I can't tell you how annoyed I am that I made such a mistake. Not that the mistake was strange. I certainly never should have suspected that even for a moment you would have seen the thing in such a false light. It is to be blind to the relative importance of things ; it is to be not conscientious, but fantastic. To give up a career of high utility rather than promise to stand aside from a single measure, which is certain to come without your help ! You must have seen before this that that is hopelessly unpractical. Go to your father (you have probably gone already) and tell him you will have the seat. Don't think for a moment that I will grudge it you. It hurt me, I confess, that you hesitated to do what I was ready to do. Surely you don't think me

unscrupulous. I can't believe it. You must know after all these years that my dangers are all on the other side. If I fail in life, as is only too likely, my failure will be due to a morbid conscientiousness. Of this I am absolutely certain. More than enough of this. I only write to ask you to burn my last letter, and to tell your father at once that you will take the seat.

Yours very truly,

"JOHN MAIDMENT."

To this letter Paul replied even more shortly.

"Dear John," he wrote, "I can't promise what my father asks, and there is no chance of his changing. I still hope that you won't promise either. It is no good my arguing about it, for you are a great deal cleverer than I am. Still I feel strongly that you had better let it alone. I would give a great deal to be able to persuade you of this. It must be such a bad business to start wrong. I go to America tomorrow week, and shan't be back till the election is over.

Yours very truly,

"PAUL BRENT."

Here the correspondence ended. Paul received no more letters from John, but on the day of his leaving home his father handed him without a word an old telegram and an open letter. The former had been sent by John as soon as he received the Colonel's telegram, and contained a grateful acceptance of the seat; the latter, which had been written at the same time, brought more expressions of gratitude, and

asked twice why Paul had refused the chance. Further missives had come from John, and it was clear that he had not withdrawn his acceptance ; and Paul, as he laid the telegram and letter on his father's writing-table, laid down with them his last hope of his friend's repentance. He could not speak ; his eyes were smarting ; he felt the pain of loneliness. He had given to his friend unquestioning faith and the generous admiration of a boy. With deep delight he had made his friend his master. Reserved and a little narrow, he had been content with this one master, and had concentrated on him all the deep enthusiasm which he could not utter. Now he had been forced to believe that this friend was weaker than himself. It was a revolution, with all the pain thereof. He had no second guide to whom he might turn : he was forced to depend upon himself ; he stood alone.

The Colonel, standing square before his empty grate, was moved by a deep sympathy for his boy, whose discomfort he in part divined. All business details concerning the son's tour had been settled between them in the briefest manner. There was no more for the father to say except "Good-by." Still he stared steadfastly at Paul, and at last he unlocked his lips. He opened his mouth to say that America would cure him of his democratic fancies, but he shut it again with no word spoken, for it did not seem as if the remark would ease his heart. He took Paul's hand and held it hard ; Paul wrung his father's hand for answer ; and so they parted.

When the young traveler parted from his sister, there was at least on one side a greater show of emotion. Letty was furious with John, and at first she willfully refused to see anything except that, like a young cuckoo, he had shoved Paul out of a seat which was a family possession. When her brother had explained with care and pains that he had refused it before it was offered to John, and that he could not have taken it even if his friend had refused it, she scolded him and John too. Their conduct seemed to confirm a theory which she was beginning to hold of the perversity of young men.

"If he is wrong," said Paul, patting her on the shoulder, "you ought to pity him. That's what women are good for."

"Is that all?" she said.

She thought it must be an inadequate view of the value of women; but, though she mocked, she was pleased. She liked the idea of pitying John. She was a little tired of contemplating him on his pedestal. Her beloved Paul had inspired her long ago with an immense admiration for his friend—an admiration which was excited to much liveliness by the free criticism of her school-boy brothers, who looked doubtfully at a man who preferred study to looking for a rabbit. She was as lively in defense as a ruffled hen, and never saw John's merits so clearly as in the holidays, when Jacky and Dicky and Teddy accused him of being a prig. These boys liked "to get a rise" out of Letty, of whom, nevertheless, they highly approved. Yet sometimes, when the younger broth-



ers were at school, their sister grew restless in the attitude of respectful admiration ; and the idea of being able to pity John came with an irresistible fascination. It appealed to something protective in her, a dormant motherliness. She had been zealous in defending an idol on a pedestal, and now the idol was proved to be so small that she could protect him under her wing.

"Be kind to him," said Paul rather hoarsely. He was sure that John would come home in no comfortable mood, and he was very sorry for him.

"Yes," said Letty with sudden tears in her eyes, "I'll try to be kind."

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## CHAPTER V.

PAUL had gone, but John still lingered in Oxford. He had stayed up after term time to write an essay, with which he hoped to gain a University prize ; but after the arrival of Colonel Brent's offer he had not written a word of his essay, nor thought of it, except to assure himself eagerly that he need never finish it. As he was taking his final leave of Oxford, he wanted to pack his books or see them packed ; and perhaps some impulse to sentimental leave-takings kept him rambling about the walks of Magdalen or the field paths of the surrounding hills. But still Letty pronounced it amazing, and the Colonel thought it strange, that John delayed his coming.

The delay was certainly unusual, for John Maid-

ment was wont to hurry to these good friends ; and, though he was not related to them even in the remotest degree, he had never known any home but theirs. Indeed, it seemed to John impossible that he had ever had any other home. The pictures of his childhood which his memory had kept were as apparently commonplace as those of most people, but in no two of them was the background the same. Here and there in those first years, which are so long, a chance scene remained startlingly clear, like a brightly lighted station in a night journey by rail, while tracts of time between, with all their infant joys and sorrows, were mere darkness. There was a picture of a woman with a dark face, and ear-rings, eyes, and teeth all gleaming, who chirped shrilly to a canary piping more shrilly in answer, while the sun poured under the yellow blind a broad flood of mottled, yellow light. There was another picture of a redder face and a gay cap, which the infant John was tearing from its place, while he was half dragged and half carried down a passage covered with oilcloth ; and, when in later life he recalled this scene, he could hear the key turn with a horrid shriek in the lock, and he was alone again in the dark, wild with grief and fury, beating on the door. There were two or three more such pictures, which John could summon from the past at will, and in every picture there was a different woman. From this fact he inferred that nurses did not stay long with him, as from the difference of the backgrounds he inferred that he had spent a great part of his extreme youth in travel.

Of all the disconnected scenes of early childhood which his memory had kept for him, the one which the boy liked best was this :

He was standing on a garden-seat, and about him was a soft arm covered with some light stuff, and he was looking down at the sea ; and the sea was all blue, like blue paint, lightly speckled with gold, and ruffled and glancing ; and close beside him was a tall tree, and somebody said it was like an umbrella, and he tried hard to see that it was like an umbrella ; and other ladies had come about him, laughing and kissing him, and saying that he was pretty. A certain perfume always brought this picture before him in a moment. And while these soft creatures were petting him, a man came laughing too and touched his cheek with a fair silky mustache, and murmured, "Little son !"

And one of the ladies cried out, "Do you call him little son because you've forgotten his name ?"

And the man answered with more laughter, "I forget everything."

After many years John could recall the exact tone of voice in which the smiling, exquisite man had answered ; and he liked to recall it and the whole scene therewith, for it was all that he could remember of his father. And John Maidment was very much interested in his father, and this impression of him as a most charming man was very pleasant to him. It explained everything satisfactorily. Besides, there was no other relative for him to think about. His mother had died before the date of his first mental

picture ; and it early became clear to him that he had either no living relations or none who cared to cultivate his acquaintance.

In the early days of his life at Brentholme he asked a great many questions about his father ; but, as Colonel Brent was the only person who could have answered them, he obtained very little information. So the boy became indignant, and asked no more questions on that subject. And very soon he became busy in building up a complete theory of his father out of the scanty materials which he had gathered, and his single vivid impression of a charming personality. He assured himself that Wilfred Maidment (even the name was suggestive of charm) had been the most brilliant and popular man of his day. He knew that the Colonel and he had been brother officers, and he decided that the slow, silent Philip Brent had found in the friendship of his irresistible comrade the greatest delight of which he was capable. It was evident that Philip had owed all the brightness of his life to Wilfred, and the guardianship of his son was but a poor return. Indeed John went so far as to assure himself that it was a great privilege for Colonel Brent to look after Wilfred's boy. As he did not like the idea of being under obligations to people, he found great comfort in this assurance. Without a doubt he was a treat, as Wilfred's boy ; and he need not trouble his guardian, who blushed and frowned under interrogation, with questions about the source of his pocket-money and the checks for schooling and tailors. Probably they came from America,

where it was understood that Mr. Maidment was dabbling in silver mines ; but, if the Colonel paid the bills, he would be paid of course when his friend came home, and in the mean time it was a privilege for him to do what he could to repay the debt of happiness which he owed to the comrade of his youth.

Thus John made for himself a delightful story of an unequal friendship in which the gratitude was all on one side, and a delightful picture of his absent parent, with the contemplation of which he often pleased himself. Once or twice in the early years the Colonel had unlocked his lips and informed John that his father was coming home ; but each time he had had to repeat the unlocking process to say that he was not coming. Then even the rumors of home-coming ceased. The Colonel occasionally received letters from Newport or Denver, or intermediate places, but he did not show them to John. He carried them off to his own den, and pored over them, making slow calculations with many figures, and answering them at last with difficulty, and yet with brevity.

When young Maidment was at school and rapidly finding out that he was more clever than his neighbors, he thought less and less about his absent parent. There was the Colonel, an excellent every-day father, more free of money than of jaw ; and for the rest the easy acquisition of all sorts of knowledge, with an average amount of summer cricket and football in winter, filled almost all his thoughts. To surpass his fellows with apparent ease, to know a lot of things and to be admired for the knowledge, to win well-

bound books, became more pleasant than toffee, though the boy always had a sweet tooth. And so, as time went on and he "socked" in places more and more exclusive, he ceased to wonder why he heard so little of his father, and why he did not see him. The father whom he had constructed for himself remained more or less in the dark, and was only dragged out with effusion on very rare occasions. When for instance John felt that his talents received a cold acknowledgment, or when he had dashed himself like a flowing wave against some solid purpose of the Colonel, then he would assure himself with fury that all would be well if his real father were with him. Trembling with a great excitement, he would fly to his ideal parent, who somewhere in the silver mountains was making a fortune in a manner the most picturesque. A fur-clad hero of Ballantyne, a modern Raleigh, chief ornament of court and camp, an exiled prince in search of adventures, there always was Wilfred Maidment, exquisite, with a fair mustache, not a day older, to carry comfort to his wounded boy.

At last came a telegram from Oxford announcing John's coming, and a few hours later came John himself. It was evening when he stepped into the cool bare hall, where the same old fox's mask smiled above the whip-rack, and where the stuffed heron leaned only a little more awry on the old marble-topped table.

At the bang of the front door Jacky and Dicky and Teddy dashed into the hall. They had but just come home for the summer holidays, and they greeted

the new-comer with a warmth which was caused in part by the intoxication of the first days of free roving. Those of the dogs who had the run of the house trooped in at their heels, and the whole party filled the house with a delightful clamor of welcome.

But John looked beyond these boys and dogs with anxious eyes. It seemed ominous to him that Letty had not come with the rest. She had meant to run out of the room with the others; she too had jumped up at the sound of the door; but some new shyness suddenly stopped her, and she stood listening, breathing quickly. John's heart sank; he was offended; he felt her criticism in the air. As he shook hands with the young Brents and patted a dog or two in passing, he was hotly but silently defending his own action, and running through once more the many arguments which proved the folly of Paul. He was looking so anxiously for the girl that at first he did not notice the Colonel standing in the entrance of his den; but the Colonel looked at him and was not satisfied. Even in the dim light his strong eyes saw that John was pale and that his mouth was anxious and irritable, and the sight made him sad. John was not far wrong in his theory of the feeling which the Colonel had had for Wilfred Maidment. The companionship of his graceful friend had doubled the light of Philip Brent's life when they were boys in the Guards; and when the same friend who had always brought his troubles to Philip finally brought his son, who was the chief trouble of the moment, the Colonel received the child without a murmur.

Both friends had married and both had lost their wives, and the one who had been left with five children took the one child of the other without a murmur, though with a sure conviction that he would have to be alone responsible for his bringing up. He had been alone responsible ; and as he had watched the boy growing in grace and in ability, there had grown up in him an affection as strong and deep as that which he had felt for his father. It had in truth become a privilege to look after Wilfred's boy. He had been glad to see the boy grow in the clean air of Brentholme and the fine simplicity of its daily life from a sallow nervous child to a young man quick and abounding in energy. As he saw the boy's industry and zeal for knowledge, he had slowly acquired an immense belief in him. Slowly, too, he had formed the theory that here was his lost friend without his old weaknesses and with all his old charm. He had said in his heart that here was a Wilfred without errors.

As he never said these things aloud, John Maidment, though he guessed the friendship which had existed between his real father and the father who paid his bills, never guessed how great a measure of the old devotion had descended to himself. The Colonel loved him as a child of his own, and yet with a peculiar tenderness for the child of his friend. Now, as he stared anxiously at him in the shadows, he told himself that he had never seen him look so ill since he had taken him, a puny child of seven, from his father's arms.



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Letty had so far conquered her unusual shyness that she could look at John, she too could see that he was not well. He was pale and silent, and on small provocation irritable; and when he talked at all he talked feverishly and laughed too often. She could see that he was ill at ease; she felt more and more sorry for him, as she would have felt for a naughty boy who had quite enough punishment. Now in his presence, as before in imagination, she found a pleasure in this pity; but, when she looked at the young man with a new kindness, he was thrilled with annoyance, as if each nerve were conscious of her venturing to criticise him. He did not want to be pitied. He must have her loyal friendship and admiration. He could not do without it. He made up his mind to broach this matter of Parliament as soon as he could find the girl alone. Better the immediate discussion of this uncomfortable topic than the gnawing consciousness that it was in the thoughts of both, and would fill every moment of silence with intolerable uneasiness.

Full of this purpose of instant speech, he went to bed and had a restless night. He had not slept well of late, and, as this was unprecedented in his life, he was vexed. At Brentholme his bedroom was next to Paul's, and this nearness sent his thoughts wandering across the Atlantic with the string of excellent arguments of which he was heartily sick. Had not this

wretched question of the borough caused him pain enough in his lonely days and restless nights at Oxford? He had told himself a thousand times that he had done right; he was furious at being obliged to tell himself so often. And now when he was at home, where it was natural that he should find rest and comfort after his struggles, the whole air was full of the criticism of this girl, this mere child, who ought to know that he was right without any explanation. He declared to himself that it would be too absurd to explain his conduct to Letty; but yet he knew that he had no chance of the repose which he needed until he had talked to her about the whole matter. He would talk to her and have done with it; but an uneasy doubt cropped up once more whether even then he would have done with it.

On the next morning, when Letty, busy with her garden-scissors, saw John coming, she saw too, more clearly than by candle-light, how ill he looked. His face was white and haggard, though he held it high and put on a severe expression. She was not at all impressed by his grand air. She had meant to be very kind to him, being very sure that he had suffered much; but she felt rebellious again, as he came and stood over her and she snipped off the wrong bud. He began to talk at once and to talk of Paul. When he had begun, it seemed easier than he had hoped. His words were always a great help to him. He spoke of Paul very kindly and regretfully, with the manner of a wise and good doctor discussing a self-willed patient. He seemed to take it for granted that his was

the only possible view, and that his listener must agree with him. Now this exasperated Letty, and her intentions of sympathy vanished with amazing quickness. She would not hear Paul spoken of as if he had something the matter with him.

"How could he promise"—she broke out suddenly—"not to do what he thought he ought to do?"

"It's absurd," began John, and could get no further. He stood digging his heel into the grass. He had expected that Letty would ask some such question, but, when he heard it, he liked it none the better.

"I don't suppose I can make you understand," he began again, and again stopped; and the girl went on with her business and said nothing. "It's absurd of Paul to suppose that his support is necessary to this measure of reform; it's certain to be; the cart-wheel will go round with or without the fly; it seems to me a sort of vanity to suppose that one is so important."

"Paul isn't vain," she said, standing straight and looking at him; "you know he isn't; he hasn't a bit of vanity."

John smiled in a superior manner.

"Don't suppose that I blame Paul," he said.

"But you do—you do blame him when you say he's vain; he isn't a bit vain."

"I think you may trust me not to abuse my friends. You may trust me so far at least. I meant no more than that it looked like attaching too much importance to himself. He was not even asked to oppose this measure, this one measure; he was merely asked

to stand on one side and see it pass. Upon my word it's ridiculous ; I can't understand it in a man like Paul."

He felt as if he must make her speak ; but she was bending her head again, that he might not see her eyes, which a thought of the absent Paul, whom she had blamed before he went, had filled with tears. Her heart was full of loyalty to her brother.

"At least," said John, after a pause, in a calmer and a more provoking tone, "it shows that Paul is not yet fit for political life."

"Perhaps he isn't," she cried, in a moment ; "perhaps he is a great deal too good."

"It's good enough for me, I suppose," he cried out angrily, "but not for Paul."

She did not answer.

"Really," he went on after a moment, "I think I may be trusted not to do a mean action ! It's too ridiculous ! Nobody ever accused me of doing anything mean. I don't pretend to be perfect, but you know as well as I do that everybody has always laughed at me for being over-scrupulous and over-conscientious, and—and—"

He stopped short, struck suddenly by the thought that there was something ridiculous in his words ; he looked angrily at the girl to see if she was smiling. She was not smiling ; she was resisting an impulse to slap him.

"Of course," he continued, "I believe as much as Paul in universal suffrage and all that ; but one must give up something in life ; one can not expect every-

thing to be just as one wants it. Was I to allow a single preference of my own to keep me from a career in which I know that I have a chance of being useful to the world? I should have blamed myself all my life long if I had refused the chance and wrapped myself in my virtue and my talent in a napkin. Why don't you write to Paul? Why don't you persuade him to come back? He knows, anyway, that I would not stand in his way for one moment."

She listened to him with pouting lips and arched eyebrows, and, when he had finished his speech, she looked up at him, and—

"I think Paul was right," she said loyally.

"Then you think me wrong?" he cried out sharply.

"Oh, John," she said, "I don't want to say any more; I don't want to blame you—only you must not blame Paul."

"Of course I am nothing in comparison with Paul."

He was sick of his own arguments, and angry with her because she would not argue. He was very restless, and, after standing silent beside her for another long minute, he shrugged his shoulders and marched off to the house. She looked after him with a face full of doubt; she was longing to throw the garden-scissors at him as he stalked away in dignity, and longing to call him back and to say that she was sorry for having hurt him.

John Maidment passed a disagreeable day, in which the clamor of boys and dogs seemed at times an intentional insult; and the disagreeable day was followed

by an almost sleepless night. He began to think that he must be ill, and visions of possible maladies trooped by his pillow. Most persuasive arguments which he might have used in his talk with Letty came to him in the silent watches, and he dismissed them more and more angrily. Again and again he declared to himself with fervor that his conduct needed no defense, that it was extremely praiseworthy. Did he not know—was he the only man who did not know—that it was waste of time to argue with girls? Girls are notoriously irrational. Was he the best judge of his own conduct, or was Miss Brent? Such a question needed no answer. He assured himself that he ought to be angry with Letty.

But let him reason as he would, no fine chain of arguments would draw him down to sleep, nor away from the haunting certainty that he should know no perfect rest till he and she were friends. They had always been friends. He could not be quiet under her disapproval. It vexed him almost beyond endurance that she, unreasonable girl though she was, should not approve of all his words and actions. His nerves and his arguments would not let him lie quiet in bed. Hot and restless he dashed out of his bedroom in the morning. He needed the luxury of the fresh clear air. He needed the presence of Letty, and to make her his friend once more.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THOUGH John was early, he was by no means the first of the household to taste the sweet air of morning. The boys had planned a visit to the brook in the valley, where, even in summer heat, there was one hole in which after a walk of a mile and a half they could get almost as good a bath as in their own rooms. These boys liked the days to be long; they followed the same pursuits; they were capital friends. If they quarreled, they made it up without explanations; if each fought for his right, the winner was as likely as not to give up the prize to the loser; if they had borne some buffets from each other, they were as one against the rest of the world, bound by an alliance unwritten, even unspoken. They took each other on a sensible work-a-day level. They did not go into solitary places to ponder on their mutual offenses; they did not conclude that the world was hollow because brother was not always loving brother, nor would make any show of loving him when he refused to do his fair share of bowling. They had tumbled up together very happily in the wholesome country air, and in that simplicity of life which seemed good to their stalwart father.

Now, as these lads returned from their morning bath they skirted the village by a field-path, and, when they came to the field beyond the churchyard, there they espied their sister running races with the old rector's

watch-dog. This excellent mongrel, who was of so amiable a temper that he would not bark at the most notorious robber of hen-roosts in the country, appealed very strongly to Letty's pity on account of the monotony of his life, which was not relieved, as is that of more commonplace watch-dogs, by fits of furious clamor and attempts to strangle himself with his collar. So when Letty had gone through the farm-yard and said "Good-morning" to the other girl, who came clattering out of the dairy with her broad face rosy and shining, and when she had gone down the village street and had received a good report of the blacksmith's baby, she remembered the parson's ineffectual guardian and loosed him and took him for a run in his master's meadow.

Letty was light-hearted this morning, for she had made up her mind to be kinder to John. To be angry with those she loved was always painful to Letty; and her conscience had been pricking her, and that was painful too. Paul had told her to be very kind to John, and now Paul was countless miles away, and she had seized the first opportunity of doing what he had asked her not to do; she had been unkind to John. As to this irritating political matter, she was quite ready to believe that they were both wrong. She had an idea, that men were always getting hot and wrong-headed about politics; and she had another idea, that young men who were given to talking of women as irrational were themselves extremely fantastic. Very likely Paul had been absurd: he was the dearest of young men, but still a young man. But nobody



must say to her that Paul was absurd ; nobody must even think it in her presence. If John would refrain from hinting or even looking blame of her brother, she would be kind to John. She could not bear not to be. Of course John was wrong—more wrong than Paul ; of course he ought to have refused to profit by his friend's loss—to step into his friend's shoes, however willful it was of the other to step out of them. John was wrong ; but, if only he would not blame Paul, she would forgive him for Paul's sake and his own. After all, there was a hidden sweetness in the thought that John could be wrong : it was delightful to forgive him. She had begun to be a little bored by his perfection. She would be kind to him : she asked herself why he should care, but she felt that he would care. It was strange that her kindness should matter to a man, strange and sweet. She had begun several romances in her day ; she had written them hastily in old copy-books, when she was tired of playing with her brothers, or riding over the downs, or going to see her village friends ; she had left them all unfinished.

As she ran with the dog in the old rector's meadow, a sudden thought of one of these tales, locked safely away in her old oak box, came to her and made her stop in a moment. What if the tale, which had seemed so far away from real life, should not be impossible after all ? What if it should be her story, here and now, in this real home of hers, which had seemed a million miles from the utmost bounds of the romantic world ? She stood still indignant ; she was

ashamed that such a thought had come to her for a moment ; she stamped her foot and bade it go ; she vowed she would burn her old copy-books and tamper no more with these phantoms, which could start up like this and make her feel silly.

“Silly” was a severe word in Letty’s vocabulary. She pressed her hands to her cheeks as if she would push in the blushes ; and then she saw that her worthy comrade crouched before her observant and challenging, with his stubby chin rubbed on the grass, and with a laugh she set off running again, and only stopped when her brothers hailed her from beyond the straggling hedge. These creatures would be young men too, and she felt inclined to scold them. Her quick eyes saw at a glance that Teddy, for a walk through the dewy grass, had put on his evening pumps, and she rated him, and the boy laughed. It was so like these young brothers of hers ; they always dashed into the wrong clothes, very often each into the other’s. If Jacky caught a fish, he caught it with Dicky’s rod and Teddy’s line, and then they argued the question to whom the fish belonged.

On this occasion, as they came out of the field-path on to the road and saw John standing hatless by the old park gates, it was borne in on Dicky that he had picked up somebody’s hat in the dim light of the hall, and so without waiting for discussion he dashed through the gates as if a gadfly had stung him, and his brothers rushed after him with a cry.

Thus Letty was left to walk toward John alone. She would have been angry with him for staring had

she not seen, as she stood bare-headed in the clear morning light, that he was pale and anxious-eyed. Indeed, John's face showed marked effects of the painful struggle which had been again and again renewed since the wretched day when he had received Paul's letter at Oxford. He had suffered much in spite of all his hot arguments with himself. He had suffered, and the girl regarding him in the tell-tale light was full of pity. If he were weak and needed help, she would try to help him. A great tenderness brought tears to her eyes. She would have liked to defend him against somebody, as she used to defend him from the curt criticisms of her younger brothers. He looked so ill that she was frightened.

John saw Letty coming with the morning sunlight slanting about her, and fresh from classical atmosphere he thought of Hebe. A poet might have pleased himself with the fancy that the dew lingered on the wayside grass and the freshness of dawn in the air till the maiden had passed by. John was not a poet; he had not even made verses except in dead languages; but the charm of the young girl touched him in his most poetic corner. His mood was very different from that of yesterday; it was different, and he knew that it would serve him better. Yesterday he had told himself that he could do without this willful creature's sympathy; but now he knew that he could not do without it, and he knew too that his softened mood would win it. He had an exquisite sense of her brightness and morning charm; he was sure that nobody would appreciate her loveliness as

he did ; he felt that she was made for him. He said nothing, but held out his hand.

"I am sorry," she said, and could say no more.

"It made me very unhappy," said John softly. His voice was always musical, and now it seemed full of feeling. "I can't do without your help," he cried more eagerly. "I want you to help me ; there is nobody so much to me."

She felt herself blushing and trembling, half happy, half vexed with the world ; and suddenly back came the thought of the unfinished romance in the box. How was she to know what these new intrusive feelings meant ? She did not like them, yet would not have them away. How should she know if this were love, though she had written fluently about it in blank books ? She wished he would say something, and not stand staring at her. If he did not let her hand go, she felt that she should pull it away, and perhaps box his ears, or perhaps begin to cry like a fool. And then she did pull her hand away, and then she thought she had been unkind again, and so she seized his hand again, and pressed it for a moment. It was a promise of help, of friendship, perhaps of more. With all her generosity, she felt that she had pledged herself, and she would not draw back ; only she would not think yet what her unspoken promise meant.

John was quick to feel, and he felt that he had better keep silence. There was no hurry ; he felt sure of her. When her hand pressed his, he accepted all which it could be made to mean ; he felt sure of her.

He had never doubted Letty ; he knew that she was true ; it was a keen delight to foresee that some day it would be this girl's chief duty to be true to him.

And now began a very healing time for John Maidment. There was peace between him and Letty. It is true that now and then came a wild impulse to prove to her that Paul had been wrong—absurdly wrong ; but he bit his lips and walked away till the fit was over, and in time this impulse came less often and less strong.

Then letters came from Paul, letters a little less brief than his speech, and in them were messages for John as for the rest ; and so Paul's name came to be mentioned naturally between John and Letty, and so a barrier fell.

At last she spoke to him of his public life with curiosity and with no sign of blame, and at the word he poured forth much which he had been longing to say to her. He spoke with growing fire of his hopes of being useful to his fellows, of his high ideal of a life devoted to the public good ; and the girl, as she listened, felt that it would be hard indeed that any one so brilliant and noble-hearted should be kept from the service of his country. She almost forgot that she had blamed him ; and nothing of the blame remained but that consciousness of his fallibility, which made him the more human, the more lovable. All things seemed to work together for the comfort of this young man who had suffered. He had a fine taste for luxury, and the very simplicity of Brentholme life gave this midsummer luxury its finest flavor. It

was the noon of the year, full summer, and the birds were still, and the trees in the deep valleys massive and dark with leaves. All day the old gray house stood open to delicious air, and now and then the air was stirred and quickened by light breezes from the open downs and open sea beyond. There were shady places in the park; there was the best turf in the world; there was a charming girl, a little more silent than usual, a little more ready to listen. And John talked about himself, with only an occasional doubt whether he were not talking of himself too much. It was delightful to feel this young girl's sympathy; it was delightful to look forward to an exciting eventful life. He looked to the future with a growing confidence. Whatever it might bring, he would be there, and he could trust himself. The presence of the girl charmed him; the vision of his future charmed him; the dream of the two combined soothed him with the most exquisite charm. This charm he did not mean to destroy by definite speech. The first approaches of young people are rich in delicate shades of feeling, when even doubts and fears are a form of pleasure; and John found the soft ebb and flow of tender emotions and hesitations very much to his taste. The lisp of the little waves in the uncertain moonlight is lost when the clear sun rises on a day of explanations and arrangements. John knew that there was a lifetime before him for plain speaking. His keen eyes grew dreamy and his lips smiled of themselves, as he lingered by Letty, and wooed her with every look and every tone of his expressive voice.

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was a milky morning in London and the day was St. Valentine's day. The west wind was blowing softly, and the soft blue sky was flecked with little fleecy clouds. These brief delusive glimpses of the spring come to us year after year in February ; it seems for a day that winter has gone, and life begins again.

To John Maidment treading the London pavement it seemed that life was beginning indeed. Parliament had just met, and he was a member ; social houses were beginning to open their doors, and he was invited to enter ; all about him was the stir of novel and interesting life. He walked fast along the Embankment, glad of the freshness of the morning and of the swelling tide with the brown barges drifting ; it pleased him to walk toward Westminster, and to glance up at the clock-tower with a keen sense of property. If an unquiet thought crossed him, he said to himself with decision that Paul would have felt so much less pleasure in all this than he did ; he was sure that Paul was enjoying his American tour as he never could enjoy political life ; he almost fancied himself envying his friend the sight of that interesting, puzzling, and gigantic country. His thoughts flew to Brentholme as he came striding into St. James's Park, and fancying Letty there bare-headed in the soft light he was glad of all the quiet and sim-

plicity for her. That peaceful, simple home seemed the right place for the pretty warm-hearted girl, who was doubtless thinking of him. It was well for her to be there, thinking of him, waiting for him. His fancies made him glow. When he was wearied by his labors, how sweet it would be to go for rest to that wholesome corner of the world, and to find welcome in those clear innocent eyes ! Brentholme and its quiet folk were there, and he could take them up again whenever he chose, and find them just the same. Meanwhile he had a thousand things to do, and he felt strong enough to do them all.

There was drill on the Horse Guards' Parade, and, as John came near, the men in their tight white jackets began to march off the ground. Their slanted bayonets were blue in the slanting light ; the drums and fifes began their cheerful comical music ; the young man's heart leaped responsive ; he walked all round the Park for the sake of their company. The waters of the big pond were pale blue, almost as blue as the slanted bayonets, in the milky light. But that the sooty trees were bare, it might have been the first morning of summer.

John marched exultant. As the full soft wind met him with a caress, his heart leaped up in answer ; his confidence was almost ecstasy. It was a glorious thing that he had taken his first step in public life ; he had but to keep marching, and he was bound to arrive. It was good for him and good for the world too, for he was on the right side ; and how great a thing it was that he, with all this power and vigor,



which he felt in every quivering nerve and every flying thought, was on the right side ! Surely it was no bad world, in which a man so eager to do good and so able found a fair way open for his feet at the very beginning of his life. Paul himself ought to be delighted that the chance had passed from him to his friend. It would be a narrow selfishness in Paul to feel a moment's regret that a Parliamentary career lay open to one who had so much greater power of doing good. John said to himself that his friend was incapable of narrow selfishness. His imagination showed him in the future some triumphant night, and he felt the pressure of Paul's hand eloquent of fervent admiration. For John, full of exciting visions, the regulation pace was not fast enough. He had soon walked away from the marching soldiers, and his pace grew quicker with his thoughts. He lifted his face to the clear morning light, in which above the old red palace of St. James, as in a bath of air, the bright-plumed pigeons were circling. It may be that each detail of the fair hour added something to the young man's exaltation, but it is certain that he did not dwell on a single detail. He felt the quickening power of the day ; and his quick mind flew, now to his many advantages, now to the questions of the day which seemed so easy to answer ; exultant it passed to and fro between the review of its own bright weapons and the scenes where they would be used. To John's flying thoughts, as to his hurrying feet, there was a slight obstruction by the garden-wall of Marlborough House ; for there were leaning or

standing the usual loungers, men and boys, with pot-hats and pipes, awaiting the daily band.

And now the band came marching in all their bravery, stalwart and gilded, and playing the music of "Carmen." The music, richer than the drums and fifes which he had left, raised John up again, and brought a rush of words to his lips. He was making fine bits of a speech as he stepped along, imagining sentences of an Opposition speaker, and darting in reply the most brilliant and annoying epigrams. He did not have a moment's difficulty in speaking for the other man, or for himself. Indeed, he was carried away so far by this delightful pastime, that in Pall Mall a lady called him twice before he was aware of her presence.

Lady Gertrude Bookham was not in the habit of calling in vain. She pushed her horse to the edge of the pavement, and stopped him short within arm's length of the inattentive youth. As John looked up with a start, the young lady laughed, but there was a little complaint in her tone as she said :

"I can't imagine why you should want to cut me."

"Nor can I," said he, like one awakened from sleep, and they both laughed and looked at each other. She was very pleasant to look at, sumptuous in shape and color as a Venetian lady of Titian, straight and active as an English girl accustomed to air and exercise. She sat her handsome horse superbly, and as she looked down upon John the moment's annoyance gave way to frank approval.

"My father wants you to come to us at Boucherett for Easter," she said.

John hesitated ; he had meant to spend Easter at Brentholme ; Boucherett was one of the finest houses in England, and Lord Whimley and Boucherett an influential person in the political world, though he belonged to the opposite party.

"You are not engaged ?" asked the young lady, quickly.

"No," said John.

"Very well, then," she said, with a short laugh, "I suppose you will honor us ?"

There was a trace of impatience in her tone, at which the tall young man who was riding with her laughed.

John looked at him with sudden enmity.

"Of course," said Lady Gertrude, plaintively, "if you have anything pleasanter to do—"

"But I haven't," said John, quickly. "I shall be delighted to come ; I was thinking of other things ; you took my breath away."

And now she beamed again, for there was something complimentary in his words and looks. As she turned her horse away she became aware of her attendant cavalier, and called to John again.

"Mr. Maidment ! Mr. Maidment, don't you know my cousin Algy ? You had better know him ; you'll meet at Boucherett."

When two young Englishmen of the well-fed class are made known to each other, there is generally a trace of defiance in their mutual recognition. Be-

tween these two the trace was more than usually definite : they both nodded stiffly. They recognized each other at a glance ; they were of about the same age ; they had been at the same school ; they had been at the same time at different colleges at Oxford ; neither had sought the society of the other ; both had been leaders in the world of boys, and both had felt from the first a mutual dislike. John now felt as if there was a look of contempt in the light-colored eyes of his old acquaintance ; he flushed slightly, and his nod was the more curt of the two.

Algy Garner looked both fierce and lazy, both heavy and refined. His head was like a marble head, which the sculptor had finished in the upper parts, but only roughly indicated in the lower. The mouth, which John remembered in the tell-tale days of boyhood, large and somewhat shapeless, with lips too often pressed tight together by anger, was now hidden by a big mustache ; but the heaviness of the chin was still apparent. The forehead, on the contrary, though it looked narrow in comparison with the jaw, was finely formed, and the aquiline nose conveyed to the most careless observer an impression of aristocracy. Mr. Garner was tall, long-limbed, strongly and rather heavily built. He was understood to be a handsome man ; he looked as if he came of a race accustomed to be promptly obeyed ; with discipline, which he detested, he would have made a fine cavalry officer ; he had no occupation ; he had had a small fortune. At school and college he had been a leader, when he chose to be, a leader in mischief of the more

dangerous sort ; but, though he had been followed, he had not been popular. He had been quick to show his contempt of any hanging back, and not the least careful to hide his opinion that the fellow who hesitated for a moment was afraid—an imputation peculiarly bitter to boys. Altogether he was an uncomfortable creature, admired rather than liked, indifferent, with flashes of white fierceness, taking all the luxuries of life without gratitude, riding hard and killing his thousands of game with small show of enjoyment. Most women admired him none the less because his manner to them varied from indifference to something like rudeness ; but, of all the women of his acquaintance, only one thought that she could manage him, and that one was his cousin, Lady Gertrude Bookham.

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## CHAPTER IX.

JOHN found London a big place. Even in those small parts of London, the political world and the world of exclusive society, there were a great many other young men. But the feeling of the crowd rather exhilarated than depressed John Maidment : he rejoiced that there were many competitors ; he felt no depressing sense of his insignificance. The race was about to begin, and he was in capital training—not “fat and scant of breath,” as a youth over full of

unpractical philosophy. He had studied metaphysics at Oxford, but had taken good care, as he told himself, not to go too far. He had stopped, as he thought, at the right place. It was right to know what philosophers were talking about, even perhaps to show them in some unoccupied moment that one knew what they were talking about; he did not mean to be set down as a Philistine politician; he must know a little of all things which interested his intelligent contemporaries, literature, art, philosophy. But for the moment these matters were of small value; all the time which he could spare from the absorbing study of politics, which had but just become the business of his life, was demanded by little social duties, which in their novelty were not without a certain charm also. There were always notes to answer, cards to leave, dinners to eat, parties at which it was well to make a bow. He was one in a crowd of young men, but he was one of the more favored; he was not only entertained as a new member of the party by the wives of political magnates, but he was made welcome also at the smaller parties of the most agreeable women. He was called "very good-looking" and "out of the common," and his air of abundant energy kept in due drawing-room bounds by good taste had a peculiar success in a society open-eyed and open-mouthed for novelty.

In some few people of this select world he aroused memories almost exciting of his brilliant and fascinating father; they asked each other what on earth had become of Wilfred Maidment, when had he vanished

and whither, was he alive or dead ; they debated whether the son were not handsomer than the father ; they tried to remember if they had ever heard of Wilfred having a son. They soon gave up these vain questions, content with the fact of the boy, a fact agreeable both to eye and ear ; they saw his good looks ; they heard that he was wonderfully clever ; they thought it better not to speak to him of their old friend Wilfred, since nobody could answer the question whether he were alive or dead.

If John received some flattering attention in society, he aroused a more intelligent curiosity in the shrewdest of the political elders whom he met in the House of Commons. It is true that an Oxford reputation does little for a youth beyond imposing on him the duty of proving that he is no prig ; but John's gift of words had been held at the university so remarkable, that rumors of his power had reached the ears even of party leaders. They smiled in a superior manner when their sons and nephews spoke of Maidment's oratory, but they thought that, prig or not, the young member was probably worth getting hold of. Moreover, when John entered the House he was a marked man ; he looked so young and so clever, that he seemed to have stepped in from the iniquitous old days of pocket boroughs. His was one of the last of these channels for introducing young men of talent to the business of the country. Boroughs are won now by other qualities than conspicuous ability ; and among the bald pates of dozing legislators the keen boyish head of the new member was refreshing as wild

flowers among the rocks. He could not help being a marked man ; he had no wish to help it.

But after all it was neither his youth nor his ability, his gifts nor his graces, which had most to do with attracting the attention of the very shrewdest of the politicians of the day ; it was the hour of his appearance in the political world. It was an hour of doubt and change.

The old lines of division, which had seemed distinct as the limit of life, were everywhere smudged and confused. The two great parties, without which it had appeared to these English politicians that politics were impossible, were so much alike at the edges that prominent persons slipped from one to the other with no apparent change of doctrine. A Tory statesman took office in a Liberal Government, and almost at the same moment a couple of Liberal landowners supported a Conservative candidate for their county. Old words had lost their meaning, and none more completely than the verb "to rat." The Conservative was eager to outbid the Whig with promises of useful reforms ; the Liberal was more prompt than the Tory to sneer at universal laws of political economy and fundamental principles of free government. Each party boasted of their common sense ; each accused the other of a latent tendency to Communism. The Liberal party, on account of the still extant confidence in their Liberalism, found it easier to interfere efficiently with personal liberty ; the Conservative, strong in their anti-revolutionary reputation, were bolder to borrow from the Socialists plans of



State interference with the homes of the poor and the purses of the rich. Liberty and order rang in the perorations of Liberal orators; order and liberty answered from the perorations of the Tories; and good simple souls thought that the good old fight was being fought with the zeal and faith of former days, and that the dust which was thrown in their eyes concealed the shock of a real battle. Meanwhile, below this empty clamor, the flinging of dust, and the half-humorous bandying of personalities, there was audible sometimes a murmur which seemed more serious. Now and then a political manager, a pulse-feeler, a wire-puller, would pause in his playful arrangements, and wonder what was coming next, dimly conscious, in one inspired moment, that a new force was at work in this world, which it was his mission to manage; that some day uncomfortable people might ask for something which was neither non-interference with their liberty of living in pig-styes nor permission to drink in poisonous water, to the glory of the British Constitution.

In days of doubt and change the eyes of less foolish men turn naturally to the young. What have they learned? What will they teach? How will the best of them face the difficulties of their time? These are interesting questions, and it happened that some people were asking them at the moment when John Maidment dawned upon London and the Palace of Westminster with his Oxford reputation, his brilliant appearance, his air of nervous energy, and the fine confidence in himself which he carried not ungrace-

fully. What wonder, then, that shrewd and hesitating elders turned with some curiosity to this youth, who was said to represent the opinions of many of his ablest contemporaries, and to have much influence with them? They eyed him as augurs may have eyed a promising chicken, who bore within him the signs of the times to come; they came about him with courtesy, and with something of the scientific interest of medical students.

Among others, the Earl of Whimley and Bouche-rett had been told that he ought to wish to have a look at the new young man, who was expected by some people to do something. Lord Whimley as a boy had kept white-mice and rabbits, and he still indulged, in the privacy of his family, a liking for drawing-room games and acting in charades; but besides these innocent tastes, his position and his cousin, Mr. Randall, who was a rising man, obliged him to display a warm interest in politics. He was the head of one of the great political families of the country; he had a family mansion in London, where the wives and daughters of the party assembled at regular intervals; his place in the country was famous not only for many historical associations, but also for its splendor and for its hospitality to all sorts of interesting people. So, when Mr. Randall had impressed on Lord Whimley that he ought to feel an interest in John Maidment, Lord Whimley, with his grave air of party responsibility, remarked to his wife that there was a young Radical "Maybird," whom she had better ask to something; Lady Whimley, with the broad smile

which was always caused by any exhibition of solemnity in her husband, asked her daughter Gertrude if she had met such a young man ; and Lady Gertrude, after plaintively expressing her wonder that her parents never could get a name right, said that they had all met Mr. Maidment at dinner, added with more emphasis that he was most interesting, and finished by deciding that he should be asked to Boucherett for Easter.

When the day of his visit arrived, John set off for Boucherett with lively pleasure. He had blamed himself long ago for having hesitated even for a moment whether he should accept this flattering invitation ; he had told himself with decision that his friends at Brentholme would have blamed him justly if for the sake of spending Easter with them he had lost such a chance of studying the prominent people of the day in their hours of less reserve. The fact that Boucherett was one of the greatest Tory houses made the invitation more complimentary, and would make the visit more interesting. John was thrilled with the idea that the big wigs of the other party might think it worth while to try to pump him, even to try to convert him ; he hoped with all his heart that they would try ; he meant to impress them. He left London for Boucherett with keen curiosity and a purpose of enjoyment. The train in which he traveled was full of guests who were going to the same house : the small dimly-lighted station seemed no more than the ante-room to the magnificent place whither he was bound ; he was amused by the masses of luggage, the bustle

of maids and men with furs and dressing-cases, the number and variety of vehicles which had been sent to meet them ; he liked the feeling of splendor and of spaciousness. The gates were vast through which the carriages were driven ; and in the growing darkness the park seemed vaster than it was ; there was a lofty portico, and a loftier hall, and the guests were led through a series of half-lighted rooms to the long gallery where in a circle of light by the farther fire-place tea was waiting for them. Even the solemnity of a party which has been but just collected did not depress John. The men were looking at each other with a suspicious air, on the defensive ; each waiting for the other to show that he desired a better acquaintance, dropping brief remarks defiantly. The women were sipping tea, and some were probably thinking that tea and travel might make their noses red at dinner. The great room and the little light, the low voices and frequent times of silence, were all part of a certain dreariness which made an emotional lady think tenderly of her home, and made her husband consider with dismay that he was bound to spend a week in that majestic place at a time of year when there was nothing to hunt or shoot.

This same long gallery was lighter when people assembled before dinner, and the gleam of shoulders and the glitter of diamonds made the scene more gay ; but still there was stiffness, almost sadness. A party of Englishmen and of Englishwomen who have been but just collected, knowing that they are expected to amuse each other for a week, can not but feel

a certain oppression, which only dinner can remove.

At last some great doors were softly opened, Lord Whimley with a muttered joke, which he had borrowed from an American paper, offered his arm to the Duchess, and his guests went two by two through a smaller room into the great dining-hall. Their feet fell on thick noiseless carpets ; one could scarcely hear the faint rustle of a gown through the murmur of voices. The high vaulted room was full of soft splendid light, and of the soft warm scent of flowers and delicate food. Flowers were in profusion from end to end of the long table, and golden dishes of fruit from the famous Boucherett houses. As the long procession of diners found their places, the row of powdered footmen broke into noiseless activity, and from a further room came the sound of music. Encouraged by the music, which was not too loud, and charmed by the luxurious atmosphere, people looked more boldly at each other, and after soup began to talk more freely. John was delighted ; the atmosphere was new to him ; he felt great pleasure in the sumptuousness of life. He had taken in no lady, and he had time to look about him. He liked to look down the long table and to see, beyond gold plate and brilliant flowers, white necks bending and jewels gleaming, and in the pauses of the music to hear light laughter and the tinkling of knives and forks. As he smiled with pleasure, seeming to breathe his native air, a sudden vision came to him of the faded chintzes and low ceilings of Brentholme ; life there

seemed thin and chilly ; he was impatient of its Spartan simplicity. The vision passed in a moment, and John was aware of nothing but of delicate odors and sounds, and of gracious people, seen through the impalpable vapor of good living. A few of these people he knew by sight, and to a very few he had spoken ; but of most of them he knew nothing at all. Only he had a comfortable certainty that most were important people in some way, and that he would make himself pleasant to those whom it was worth while to please. For the present he scarcely cared to ask who they were ; it was enough that they were part of this luxury, which was new to him and very delightful ; he was content to accept them vaguely as a rich background of duchesses.

But if John was content to enjoy his dinner and say little, his neighbors were by no means of the same mind. He sat between old Sir Ludovick Rafferty and Lady Charmian, and both were inclined, as usual, to talk. Sir Ludovick, though according to the common notion of success he had been singularly unsuccessful in life, was very clever, almost as clever as he looked. His eyes, which were very near to his long fleshy nose, twinkled as brightly as a boy's. He spoke much less from the throat than most Englishmen, and the marked movement of his lips, which he moistened often with the tip of his tongue, contributed to his air of an old comedian. He had the face of a Parisian actor of farce, and the head of a great philosopher. His imagination was only weaker than his logical faculty, and he had a great collection of stories, of which

many were indecent but all were comical. If some of these tales were rather hard on his friends, it was not due to malice, but only to the subjection of friendship, as of everything else, to his intense delight in his own humor. Sir Ludovick Rafferty had hardly turned one twinkling eye on John Maidment before he was sure that he was next to an intelligent listener. As he very soon found out that his young neighbor was a new-comer in the social world, he favored him at intervals during dinner with brief notes on the people present.

John was delighted to listen, gaining instruction with amusement. He reserved to himself the right of disapproving of his informant; he had a suspicion that he was not a good old man; but for the moment he abandoned himself to the enjoyment of Sir Ludovick's gossip as to the other novel luxuries. Already there was somebody about whom he particularly wished for information; again and again, as he glanced about him, he had met the quiet gaze of two round brown eyes, which regarded him with a fixed contemplative look, and rather melancholy. Though the lady's eyes were large and pathetic, she seemed to the energetic youth neither young nor pretty; even at that distance and in that becoming light she looked tired, freckled, dark, and faded, a little puffy under the large eyes; she had drawn round her shoulders a light shawl, as if even in that soft atmosphere she felt chilly. But John read interest in her level musing gaze—interest in him; and it was this which attracted his eyes again and again to the dull pathetic orbs of the chilly lady.

It was not long before Sir Ludovick, in one of the intervals of his dinner, which he enjoyed thoroughly, discovered the direction of the young man's glances.

"Do you know her?" he asked suddenly; "do you know Mrs. Lulham?"

He licked his lips and nodded to where the lady sat, a little lower down on the other side of the table.

"No," said John, and looked expectant.

"I could tell you a story," began the old gentleman, with his philosophic head on one side, like a magpie's.

"Don't listen to him," said the lively and good-natured Lady Charmian. "Lud is a very wicked old man, and tells stories about everybody."

Sir Ludovick pointed a sharpened finger-nail at her.

"I can tell you one about her," he said.

"Good gracious!" cried the lady. "Stop your ears, Mr. Maidment"; but she laughed aloud as she spoke. "Susan Lulham is perfectly charming," she said—"dreadfully clever, but quite charming. We'll make her sing this evening."

"She has a voice like a consumptive mouse," whispered Sir Ludovick hoarsely. Lady Charmian ignored this uncomplimentary comparison.

"There's something about her singing," she said, with enthusiasm, "that you don't get in the singing of the very best professionals."

"Yes—wrong notes," said Sir Ludovick, and he chuckled.

"Oh, you wicked, wicked old man!" cried Lady



Charmian, beaming with amusement. "You must never believe Lud," she said to John; "and you must admire Susan Lulham. She is awfully interesting; she is a spiritualist and all sorts of things; she has the oddest experiences."

"Is she a medium?" asked John.

"She is not the happy medium," said Sir Ludovick, and licked his lips; and John laughed, for indeed the lady's eyes were turned upon him with a most melancholy interest. But though Mr. Maidment could not help laughing at this very comical old man, he reminded himself, even while he laughed, that it was in this way that frivolous people spoke of their superiors; that Sir Ludovick and the laughing Lady Charmian with her white teeth were almost incredibly frivolous. He looked at Mrs. Lulham with an interest which began to respond to her own; he thought it likely that she was really accomplished; he felt almost sure that she had a fine taste.

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## CHAPTER X.

WHEN with a great moving of chairs and rustling of fine raiment, some courteous hesitations, and deprecating bendings of fair necks, the troop of ladies had sailed out of the great dining-room, Sir Ludovick drew his chair closer to John's, and, with his twinkling old face close to his attentive ear, favored him

with a few notes on the family who were entertaining them so royally.

"Willy Whimley is a dear fellow," he said; "I have known him since he was the height of this decanter—drink this claret before the boys begin to smoke; it is good—he is a dear fellow, but a very light weight. Look at him trying to look substantial; he knows that Randall has his eye on him and expects him to look solid; he only looks apologetic. Whimley is always silently apologizing for being an earl, and for being able to buy us all up. He could buy me cheap. Do you know his wife well? No? She's charming; she's the laziest woman in England; she laughs and grows fat, and it is her husband she laughs at. Their boy is sensible, sensible as a cabbage; he is going round the world—everybody goes round the world nowadays—to improve his mind; he is getting up the dead meat question; he will write about it, when he gets back, in the new Review. Lady Gertrude is worth ten of him; she is a fine creature."

He seemed to draw the lady in the air with his long-fingered old hand.

"She is very handsome," said John.

"But she is too moral," said Ludovick regretfully. "I feel as if she were always picturing my death-bed repentance."

He chuckled, much delighted with this fancy.

"Ah!" he said in a moment; "that villain Algy has lit a cigarette, I can drink no more. You young men are selfish; you don't drink, and you won't let

others drink ; you have the blood of fish without their imbibing power. Do you know Algy Garner ? He is very modern, very rude ; he plays without grace and races without enjoyment. How he glares at his cigarette ! Something has disagreed with him. He is very hard hit, and he hopes to marry his cousin."

"Lady Gertrude ?" asked John, with an interest which surprised himself.

"She will have a fine dot," said Sir Ludovick with three nods. "The young man is in a tight place ; he bets heavily ; he gets the very best information ; no wonder he's ruined."

"And will she marry him ?" asked John, feeling a quick rush of his old indignation against his school-fellow.

Sir Ludovick raised his shoulders, and looked more than ever like an inspired Punch.

"All my life," he said, "I have been studying women, and I have arrived at one conclusion, which I will give you for your guidance. Never be sure that a woman will say the unreasonable thing ; never be sure that she will do the practical thing ; she is capable of anything to disappoint you."

"Thank you very much," said John, with a smile, which he forced. For some reason he had lost his taste for this old man's pleasantries ; that disapproval of him which he had kept in reserve seemed to be coming up with a rush.

"There are many aspirants," said Sir Ludovick in a confidential whisper ; "there is another over there—the man with the fat eyes and sleek beard, next to

the Duke—when there is a duke, Smithers Plumley is always next to him. Smithers has the best cook in London, and the worst heart; he is very rich, and is said to be very good-natured; he has the worst male tongue in London. I am talking of you, Smithers, and giving you a funny character.”

Mr. Plumley’s eyes vanished as he laughed and nodded; he was afraid of old Sir Ludovick.

“Then there is Randall,” said Sir Ludovick, turning again to John. “Many think that he will be the lucky man; he pretends to consult Lady Gertrude on political affairs; she is enormously flattered. Randall is very deep. He began his political career by printing a brilliant satire and making a humorous speech about bishops; he made people laugh; it was almost fatal to him. But he saw his error. For years he has been uttering dull excellent speeches, looking wise and quoting statistics; he is the most rising Conservative of his age; he has a solid reputation for statesmanship and success; he dare not risk his reputation for success; he will never ask our fair friend till he is sure she will take him.”

“Our fair friend” had not been happy in the drawing-room while the old friend of the family had been sketching her suitors over his claret. She was annoyed with the Duchess, who indeed had a gift of irritation. This great lady had a face which betrayed no emotion, and this was naturally exasperating to an impulsive girl, who showed every feeling as it passed. She was often called “the handsome Duchess,” and she certainly had an imposing appearance, of which much was

due to a high nose, painted eyebrows, thin lips, and the very latest Parisian wig. If she condemned her neighbors, she seemed to pronounce sentence on them from a sense of duty, to have detected with her fine nose an odor dangerous to the society of which she was the only genuine guardian. She was an admirable figure-head to a high-class vessel. With this remarkable woman Lady Gertrude was angry. She had heard her say something disagreeable about her cousin Algy. As she herself had but just been quarreling with him, she of course defended him with the more warmth; her warmth had raised a smile on other female faces, and now there was no repose for her until she had made her cousin suffer too.

As soon as Algy came in with the other men, he looked at her and saw that she was uneasy. She moved this way and that on her sofa; she was flushed, and fanned herself with unnecessary vigor; she would not summon him with a look, but she meant him to come to her. He came slowly, and stood looking down at her.

"What is it?" he asked presently.

"She's an odious, vulgar woman," said Lady Gertrude, with a glance at the most refined of duchesses.

Algy Garner turned his light eyes on the Duchess, as if he thought of wringing her long neck.

"I wish women would keep their tongues quiet," he said.

"I don't know why you say 'women,'" she said in an aggrieved tone; and, as he showed no sign of explaining his speech, "Of course," she continued,

"if you mean to class me with the most scandalous and malicious woman in England—Oh, you can't go beyond that!—you are very kind, I'm sure."

"I never said a word about classing you with anybody," he said ; and he began to bite his under lip.

"I am sure I don't want to abuse the Duchess"; and as she went on she grew more and more plaintive and more and more emphatic. "Why should *I* want to abuse her? What harm can she do *me*? I shouldn't have thought that you would *like* to be called a black-leg—"

"What?"

The question came like a growl.

"Oh, of course she didn't say so in so many words; she said you were ruined again, and that you couldn't pay your debts, and that you had no business to be going about as if you had a pocket full of money, and—ah!"

She seemed to be stopped by sheer disgust, as she twisted her fine shoulders impatiently and began to fan herself more vehemently than ever.

"What business is it of hers?" said Algy; and he looked at the Duchess again as if he were on the very point of twisting her finely-dressed head off. Then he seated himself by the side of his cousin, who sat the straighter on the sofa, and said, "It's true, you know; I told you. I am in a bad place—I told you; I told you that I must have £500, and I asked you to get it from my uncle."

"And you want me to ask my father for it," she said, plaintively still, but more kind.

"I shan't get it if you don't," he said with a short laugh.

The tribute to her power led her yet further back on the way to amiability. He was looking fixedly at her, and she passed from the thought of her power with her father to the thought of her power with this untamed young man; she was proud of managing him; she found herself smiling before she intended. Smiling and still flushed with her late emotions, she looked splendidly beautiful. He said to himself again that he did not care a bit (even to himself he used a stronger monosyllable) for racing or gambling, that they might all go to blazes if his beautiful cousin would take him—and take him she should. As for the horses, grooms, carts, theatre-stalls, dressing-cases, and the thousand and one luxuries which grew on him like barnacles, he was ready to curse these encumbrances on young activity. Disgust of these clogging nothings had sent him into the desert before now or to sleep in a torn blanket among the rocks of the Rocky Mountains; and perhaps the truest pleasure which he had yet enjoyed was the sense of his strength after roughing it with the roughest. Since hunting had stopped, Algy Garner was more than ever sure that there was only one thing in life worth getting, and that was his cousin Gertrude. He was so lost in regarding her that he had almost forgotten his urgent need of the money, when she said, "Of course I will get it for you."

She spoke with a pout, in which vanished the last element of her grievance; and, being now in a com-

fortable mood, she began to sink into a familiar strain of confidential lecturing of this reckless young man, while he sat staring and pulling his mustache. She was expressing once again her wonder why he was so absurdly extravagant, and what pleasure he could possibly find in grieving his best friends, when he suddenly got up and left her. He thought he saw that, while she talked to him, she was looking at John Maidment; this made him angry, and he was more angry when John instantly crossed the room and took the place which he had left. John was still enchanted with the atmosphere of luxury, the length of the brilliantly lighted gallery, the deep recesses of the windows full of more grateful shadow. The matter-of-course magnificence was new to him, and it seemed to him that the center of it all, the jewel in the casket of gold, was the daughter of the house. Lady Gertrude on her side had openly proclaimed her warm interest in this new young man. All her interests were warm; her heart was warm; if her temper was sometimes hot, she was generous with her admiration. Not only were her geese swans, but her swans were the very largest and whitest birds that ever curved their necks with pride. John began to talk with brightness and candor of his first experience of political people and his first impressions of society; and she listened and began to beam, and to refresh herself with the conviction that she had made a friend who was (to use a favorite expression of her own) "not just like everybody else." She was sorry when their talk was interrupted; but she was a most



conscientious hostess, and in presence of her mother's unruffled laziness she felt the full responsibility for everybody present.

"Hush!" she said; "Mrs. Lulham is going to sing. We must go nearer to the piano; it's wonderful, but not very strong."

It was not very strong. Those who were fond of music drew nearer and nearer to the piano, as the lady began to sing. She murmured over the keys very pathetically; in spite of Sir Ludovick's harsh judgment she was almost exactly correct; she sang with a world of meaning. It was supremely melancholy, and it was immensely admired. John, standing close to the end of the piano, could not avoid the singer's eyes, sorrowful, inscrutable. They made him nervous, and yet he liked the dumb pathetic interest with which they gazed on him. Lady Charmian, who had professed so much admiration for Mrs. Lulham's singing, had glided away to the farthest end of the long gallery, that she might listen to Sir Ludovick, who crisply stated that the best part of the performance was that it was inaudible at two yards from the instrument. But though there were many who preferred conversation, there were many too who pressed the sweet singer to sing again and again.

So when the woful German song was done, she sang a little Tuscan verse scented with death and love, and then a Spanish serenade in which passion seemed all pain, and at last an English merry-making air, which was most melancholy of all. Lady Charmian came back in time to press the singer's hands,

and to say with real conviction that there was no such singing in the world.

"Dear Del!" said Mrs. Lulham for answer, very sadly and sweetly, and with her large dull eyes still fixed on John Maidment. She was very unconventional, and did not wait for ceremonious introductions. As her admirers fell away from the piano she came to John. "I feel as if I had known you in a former state," she said gravely in a low voice.

The young man was startled, but he did not lose his charm of manner. He looked very wide-awake in contrast with the lady's weak dreaminess; and yet he found himself presently without any purpose of his own, seated by Mrs. Lulham in a secluded window-seat.

"I have not seen you before in this world," she said, still gazing at him with a quiet interest.

"Not in this world," answered John, nodding to the people who filled the gallery; "I am a new-comer—a raw Oxonian." He smiled, but she did not.

"And I am a rare comer," she said. "I live in Naples; I am always ill in Naples; I have no lungs; I live by will. *They* tell me to live. Who do I mean by they? Ah! You are different. They tell me that you are different. I should like to live to see your future. You are very interesting. Let me read your hand."

No sooner had Mrs. Lulham risen from the music-stool than Lady Charmian seated herself briskly at the piano, and dashed impulsively into a waltz tune.

She was always eager to please somebody, and on the look-out for "a bit of fun." "A bit of fun" were the words most often on her smiling lips.

At the sound of dance music the daughter of the house, flushed and radiant, turned to a group of the younger men, and appealed to them not without a tone of authority. The more energetic responded, and pushed some of the furniture out of the way, and in a minute a few active couples were whirling down the long gallery. Delia Charmian laughed aloud and quickened the pace, as Lady Gertrude swept into the dance a light but resolute diplomatist. Lady Gertrude was in the highest spirits, but in another moment she felt a pang of annoyance. As she swept by one of the windows, she saw in the shaded seat Mrs. Lulham and John Maidment; and she saw too that the lady was holding her companion's hand with her tiny yellow fingers, and was gazing gravely on the palm.

"A little withered monkey!" said Lady Gertrude to herself, as she stood panting at the end of the long gallery, and she began to beat the floor with her foot impatiently.

When Delia Charmian started "a bit of fun" it seemed as if it would never end. Having set the dancing going at Boucherett, she very soon gave up her place at the piano to her daughter, who looked no younger than she by candlelight and danced less lightly, and the party became so gay that it was long before the men were left alone. John would have gladly gone to bed, but as all the younger men pre-

pared to smoke, he did not like to be exceptional on this first evening. So he too repaired to that sumptuous Oriental apartment which Lord Whimley had furnished after the successful journey in the Levant, of which he had printed an account in one elegant octavo volume for private circulation only.

Very sumptuous was this Eastern chamber, and rich with warm shaded lights. Against the walls were deep low divans, and above the divans trophies of Damascus blades and Arab guns, curious brasses and tasseled pipes. The floor was tiled like the walls of the mosque of Omar, and thick rich rugs lay on it, and in the middle was a shallow tank where a fountain could be made to play. There were small round tables, each a fine specimen of inlaid work, and the open-work shutters were as the windows of an Egyptian harem. It was very complete. John liked it, though he cared little for smoking. He sat in a corner with a cigarette in his mouth, and listened with indifference to the scraps of talk which fell from the lips around him in their moments of leisure.

Smithers Plumley was the chief speaker. He sat on the soft divan as if he had been made for it; he had crossed his fat legs like a Turk; he was sleek as the favorite cat of the Shah of Persia, and seemed to overflow with loving-kindness. Nevertheless, his words were not agreeable to Mr. Garner, on whom he was smiling most sweetly.

"He says that of course you ride hard, but with no judgment."

"That's your opinion, is it?" said Algy Garner,

chucking the end of his cigar into the fire rather viciously.

"My opinion! My dear chap, you know I only know a horse from a cow because he hasn't got horns. I believe that a horse never has horns. Why do you laugh? Does he ever have horns? I shall be still more afraid of him if I find he can gore me."

Plumley was clearly in the vein. His comfort was much increased by the absence of old Sir Ludovick, before whose wit the wit of this little fat gentleman kept timidly at home. As his audience laughed at his views of the horse, he smiled on the comfortable world till his eyes were scarcely visible.

"Does he think that he can ride?" asked Garner, with low-voiced scorn.

"I rather think he does," said the other, beaming round on the circle with large friendliness; "I thought that it was generally agreed that Regy was a fine horseman." One man nodded, another grunted assent, but Algy said nothing. "Don't suppose, dear chap, that Regy was crabbing you," said Smithers, generously; "he only said that you were a trifle hard on your horses, and that some mare of which you think a great deal—"

"Molly! What of her?"

"Not much of her," said Mr. Plumley, beaming; "he said that you had knocked her to pieces."

"He lied," said Mr. Garner, curtly.

"Oh, I only tell you what he said: he said it was a pity to ruin such a good beast."

The little gentleman spoke with invincible good-humor.

"She never was more fit in her life."

"Regy is generally considered a good judge," said Smithers Plumley, softly, rolling for himself another cigarette.

"You may tell your friend Regy," said Algy Garner, "that I will ride Molly against any brute in his stable over any course he likes."

"Oh, my dear chap!" cried the other, looking round as if he would appeal to everybody to prevent such madness.

"I only make one condition," continued Garner—"that he will ride his own horse."

Smithers regarded him with a smile, which looked kind, but was undeniably provoking. "Don't do it," he said, shaking his sleek head; and then, as Algy said nothing, he added in a minute, "not that it would do any harm to make your offer! You don't catch Regy making a match for love."

Algy bit his cigar hard, and kept his mouth shut; and it is possible that no more would have been said had not a simple youth uplifted from a corner a voice which had hardly ceased cracking. This boy was strikingly suggestive of heavy losses on the turf. His smoking-clothes were redolent of superfluous money; his long, thin legs looked meaningless until the spectator thought of horses; his pink, innocent face was a standing invitation to the crafty. This youth, whom Nature had formed in a playful mood to drop gold on

race-courses, spoke from his corner with a fine knowing air, and said :

"Algy don't do much either, unless the money's on."

"You amaze me," said Smithers Plumley, beaming on the boy. "I thought that Algy was reformed—or broke—or something. He has promised to be a good boy, and never, never, never to bet any more." Here he looked again at Mr. Garner, and wagged his head playfully at him.

"I'll back myself for five hundred," said Algy, who looked dangerously white.

"Oh, you bad boy! Stop him, somebody!"

"You need not be afraid for your friend," said Algy, venomously : "I happen to have the money, or shall have it to-morrow ; I'll put it in your hands, if you like." With a look of undisguised distaste at Mr. Plumley's hands, which were dimpled like a baby's, he chucked the end of his cigar into the fire-place and went out.

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## CHAPTER XI.

THE first day of the Boucherett party was pronounced by Lady Gertrude to be little better than a failure. She had planned an expedition to the ruin, which all visitors were bound to see ; and since she was never content with making a plan but must settle all the details too, and since no people either can

or will do exactly what they are meant to do, it was no uncommon declaration of Lady Gertrude that nothing ever went right. The truth is that the plans of this magnificent young lady suffered from over-elaboration, and that many people were sick of her expeditions or entertainments before they began. So on this occasion some of the guests had begged not to be taken ; others had asked to go in the wrong carriage ; and Sir Ludovick had been most annoying of all, for he had talked of nothing but the picnic, and "picnic" was a word which always displeased her. She could not bear to think of herself as getting up picnics. Nor had her parents contented her. She liked them to leave all arrangements to her, but to seem not to leave them ; and it was aggravating that her mother would sit in her favorite chair smiling and showing in every curve how much better it was to repose than to go flying about the country in a string of vehicles. As for the Earl of Whimley and Bouche-rett, that influential person had waited in the obscurity of his farther mushroom-house until the coast was clear and he might slip back in safety to his turning-lathe—and so he had played his part not at all to the satisfaction of his daughter, who suspected his hiding-place and could not smile at the mental picture. So Lady Gertrude's day had begun with vexation, and she had fretted and sighed, and had found her only consolation in condemning herself to the most disagreeable place in the carriage which she most disliked. She had seated herself by the side of the Duchess in the barouche, and had bidden Smithers



Plumley, who had a taste for duchesses, to amuse them from the opposite seat.

Smithers Plumley had much tact, and quick sympathy with feminine moods. As the carriage rolled solemnly along the country road, he devoted himself to the amusement of the Duchess ; while Lady Gertrude, under the soothing influence of silence and smooth motion, recovered a fair amount of placidity. Smithers was just scandalous and malicious enough to amuse the Duchess without offending the young lady, while his appearance of gayety and good-living seemed to vouch for his essential good-nature. It was almost impossible to think that this well-fed, jolly gentleman ever intended to hurt anybody. The Duchess was so well amused that she almost forgot to make the one or two ill-natured speeches which she had thought of in bed as likely to wound the daughter of the house ; and the party had almost reached their destination before she brought the little speeches out, and then rather jerkily. They referred to Algy Garner, and were addressed to Mr. Plumley ; and, though the Duchess could extract nothing but deprecating looks from that cautious gentleman, she had the satisfaction of feeling Lady Gertrude leap in her place and turn sharply away.

Then, when they had arrived at their ruins and had left their carriage, Mr. Plumley seized his opportunity and showed with the utmost delicacy how little he sympathized with the Duchess's tone about Algy Garner. He was so sorry for Algy, who was such a nice fellow ; he seemed to take for granted her

cousinly interest in the reckless young man ; he regretted deeply his perversity in getting into scrapes ; and, softly following this train of thought, he let slip something of Algy's bet in the smoking-room on the night just past. Lady Gertrude with sudden passion demanded details, and when she heard the amount she was hurt and angry indeed. The very sum which she was to get for him he was pledged to throw away before he held it. He was incurable ; he was one of her failures. Life was full of failures, and this miserable picnic was another of them. Even the excellent luncheon and the contentment of her guests, the trees all powdered with fresh green of the spring, the calm of the distant river, the delicate grass below and the feathery white clouds high up in the blue—even all these good things failed to soothe the troubled spirit of Lady Gertrude Bookham. Trifles irritated her. She was annoyed by the Duchess's method of sliding food between her tiny, scarcely parted lips ; she was annoyed by the hearty laughter of Lady Charmian, who laughed till she cried at nothing. She was even annoyed by the attentions of Mr. Randall, in whose talk she generally felt sure of being interested. Now she tacitly accused him of heaviness, and her plenteous generosity and hospitality were offended by his rigid abstinence. Mr. Randall had a tendency to fat, against which he seemed to be ever contending. He walked with excessive vigor and determination, and there was a perceptible strain on the buttons of all his coats. At this luncheon in the open air, which was not to be a picnic, he offended the lady whom he

was anxious to please by a cold-blooded refusal of the choicest viands. She was vexed with him and showed it ; and she said to herself, not for the first time, that he looked too like a vigorous and trustworthy railway guard. Though there is no type more likely to gain the confidence of the intelligent public, Lady Gertrude held that it was inconsistent with the higher statesmanship. She, like almost all his friends, had forgotten those early flashes of indiscretion which the ambitious politician had been teaching the nation to forget. Everything went wrong ; nobody behaved as he or she ought. Luncheon was half over when Mrs. Lulham came strolling from the neighboring grove with John Maidment by her side.

"The luncheon is nearly finished," said Lady Gertrude in her aggrieved tone.

"I never eat," said Mrs. Lulham quietly.

John looked at Lady Gertrude, but she ignored his looks. He had come from the wood with his heart full of pleasure ; he had been conversing with one whom he found the cleverest of women ; he was flushed with the most delicate flatteries.

Perhaps Lady Gertrude saw in him some trace of a vanquishing air. When he spoke to her with a happy friendliness, she answered shortly, and, as she turned to Mr. Randall with a string of unimportant questions, she moved just so far that John Maidment could find no place by her side. John felt himself snubbed, and was very angry. As he stood irresolute, he caught the twinkling eye of Smithers Plumley and was more angry. Lady Gertrude's manner

was like a shower-bath to his sensitive nerves: he hated it, and he hated her for the moment. This was that aristocratic insolence of which he had heard; these were the manners of the barbarian class. On the way home his thoughts ran the same way. He told himself that he had enjoyed a most useful experience; but he did not enjoy it much. He told himself that he was following a most useful train of thought. It is only centuries of insolence, he thought, which could produce this perfect flower. This girl treated him like an inferior being; he would like to show her which was the better, he or she. He would show her some day. Changes were coming, and coming quickly; and these people were too dull to see them. This excessive and enervating luxury was founded on the possession of land by the few; that at least was doomed, and with it would vanish this hereditary insolence of a landed class. What was this girl that she should think herself better than he? How absurd that she should think herself his equal! She would know better some day. Even he, whom she fancied she could snub with impunity, would be compelled to lend a hand to the destruction of that old state of things which alone made possible the existence of such an arrogant maiden.

It was not long before John Maidment had recovered his amiability. He passed from indignation to pity. If Lady Gertrude knew as much as he knew, she would be more careful how she treated him. They were all stupid, these people who fancied that the world was made for them. The world was made

for him who knew how to make the world. John came down to dinner, feeling that the fate of thirty or forty guests collected in the stately house of Boucherett was in his hands. If they did not make him their friend, it would be the worse for them. He went in to dinner, unruffled and with self-respect restored; and the ceremony of dinner, with its easy splendor and its distant music, soothed him more and more, until again he took a genial, if somewhat contemptuous, view of the worthy folk around him. Let them have their hour, he thought, and I—I too will enjoy it.

Later in the same evening, when Mrs. Lulham had uttered her faint expressive notes and some were playing cards and some were talking, John wandered into a room which opened out of the gallery, and saw before him the entrance to an inner shrine wherefrom a richer light was pouring. Across the entrance a heavy curtain was half drawn, and with the light and fragrance of hot-house flowers the sound of a voice came also. Lady Gertrude was speaking, and speaking in her most plaintive tone; but suddenly the even flow of her complaint was checked, and checked most rudely.

“And this is why,” said the voice of Mr. Garner, full of compressed fierceness—“this is why you’ve kept me hanging about you like an infernal— Ah! I’m sick of it; I’m sick of getting nothing but sermons.”

There was a pause before the word “sermons,” in which John imagined a strong epithet swallowed with

difficulty. He had not time to move before Garner came out, and passing him without a word or sign went through a side-door, which he left shaking behind him. John turned to go back to the gallery, but stopped. He felt a strong impulse to look at the girl. He remembered that she had snubbed him ; he would like to see if she would snub him again ; he was not afraid of her ; he should see at a glance if he were intruding, and could retire in a moment. In a moment he had passed the curtain and was in the room.

The Duchess was fond of saying that Lady Gertrude did not know how to dress herself, and that she wore clothes which were not suitable for a girl. It is certain that this girl loved sumptuous raiment and to adorn herself with jewels. In the soft light of the little room, she herself was rich and lustrous as a jewel in a shrine. There was a flush on her cheek, and her dark eyes were soft and pleading. There was a sparkle of gems at her round white throat, and of tears on her long lashes. As she looked up from the low couch and saw John in the doorway, the flush deepened and she drew her hand indignant across her eyes. The young man moved as if he meant to go.

“Don’t go,” she said quickly.

He came in, and sank down on the seat by her side. He seemed to taste the fragrance of a splendid tropical flower. He had drunk more wine, and richer, than he had known in his ascetic boyhood ; he had yielded himself to the enjoyment of languishing

music ; he was in a mood for most delicate delight. After a silence of a few minutes, she spoke again with lips which were still tremulous.

"You mustn't think," she said—"I don't want you to think for a moment— It's nothing, nothing at all. I am very much annoyed ; that's all. He's my cousin, and one of my oldest friends. You won't think that, because I am such a fool as to cry—will you ?"

It was perhaps a little incoherent, but John understood her and knew that he could answer better by looks than by speech. As she turned impulsively to him with her final question, her beautiful arm touched him, and thrilled him with a new feeling. All her pride seemed to have gone. Her great eyes, yet dim with tears, seemed to ask his sympathy. His voice sounded to himself low and eloquent as he assured her that he understood her meaning.

"I can't think how a man can be so silly," she said ; and he waited to hear more. "Just fancy !" she said with increasing emphasis. "Can you imagine such a thing ? He borrowed some money to pay bills, which ought to have been paid long ago, and went directly—directly—and put it all on some horse."

Her voice rose gradually from a low tone of regret to high complaint. John felt a quick increase of interest.

"Who told you about his backing the horse ?" he asked.

"Mr. Plumley told me. He was very sorry about

it. He is so funny that one does not expect him to feel things ; but even he was sorry about that."

"It was five hundred pounds?"

"Yes."

"It was Plumley who made him do it," cried John with sudden anger. For the moment he was possessed wholly by a quick rush of virtuous indignation ; there was no room in him for anything but measureless disgust at the mean conduct of this unctuous Plumley ; his voice quivered with emotion as he told her of the talk in the smoking-room. As he spoke, he saw how good it was to open the girl's eyes to the character of this wealthy admirer, who with dishonesty had been opening her eyes to the weakness of another. It was not right that this splendid being should marry either of these men ; she was as much too good for a sly millionaire as for an ill-tempered spendthrift. He would save her from both these rivals ; it was his clear duty ; it was absorbing ; it was politic. Lady Gertrude's eyes were fixed upon his face, which glowed with righteous indignation. She admired him and his right anger ; she interrupted him with exclamations of horror ; when he had finished she thanked him warmly.

"I always knew of course that he was horrid," she said, "and sly, and scandalous ; but I did not think that any man could be so mean. It's like a woman."

"Don't say that," said John softly ; "I have such a high ideal of woman."

"I sometimes think that one is a fool to have any



ideals. This is too shocking. That there should be two men staying here, in this house, two gentlemen and friends of ours, and that one should be so pitifully weak and the other so wicked!" Her voice was full of sharp complaint, but it sank again to its deep pathetic tone. "How can one have any ideals?" she asked.

"We must not give up high aims because others are unworthy," said John softly, and he found a pleasure in the use of the word "We."

There was a pause, and then she said with a smile beginning to come, "How strange that I should discuss these things with you!"

"It's very pleasant for me; I feel as if you treated me as a friend."

"That's what I like," she said with intense conviction; "I like to make friends."

"If you will tell me anything at any time, and if I can ever do anything for you—" He stopped, and looked at her with devotion. Her dark eyes fell before his, and she did not speak for a minute. "Can't we shake hands on our friendship?" he said with an awkward laugh; and he raised her soft warm hand in his.

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## CHAPTER XII.

WHEN John Maidment and Lady Gertrude had shaken hands on their friendship, they began to moralize. Lady Gertrude was very fond of moralizing.

They discussed the high aims of life; they found many points of sympathy. Indeed, though Lady Gertrude would have been offended by any doubt of her complete Toryism, which was a matter of course in a member of her family, her warm heart was often aglow with some scheme as revolutionary as philanthropic. She was not rigidly, prosaically consistent. She was almost as full as John of the desire to help her fellow-creatures, and she had made many more practical endeavors to help them. It must be confessed that she was charitable uncomfortably, fretting and sighing, but generous withal. When an old man in the village broke his leg, she took it as a personal grievance. She expected a great deal from her poor friends, though she was given to declare with vehemence that she expected nothing from so bad a world. When people disappointed her, she was fretful over their shortcomings. If they told her rudely that she herself was not perfect, she was in a hurry to confess it. She confessed with emphasis and passion, and always felt the better for her confession. She thought of herself as distinguished by high ideals and *of course* falling short. Thus she soothed her conscience; and she soothed it, too, by being fretful over her neighbors' offenses, by deploring the wickedness of an idle world, which she had no wish to abjure. She felt a warm interest in John; as she sat in that quiet corner and listened to his facile speech, she declared to herself again that she had never met so interesting a young man. Her generous admiration led him easily from the discussion of general propositions about life

to the more absorbing subject, himself. But, though he felt the temptation to be most eloquent on himself and on his hopes of the future, he restrained the topic within due bounds, and so pleased her the more. He did not talk too much about himself; he spoke more and with finer feelings about those who had come nearest to him in life.

It seemed to the girl, as she listened, that he had lived in a romantic air. This delighted her, and made her look at him with quickly growing interest; for she had said to herself a thousand times that in modern life there was no romance. She had seen her friends make excellent marriages with men for whom they did not care a jot, and she had sniffed scornfully at their easy acquiescence and the cheap sentimentalisms of the mothers who had arranged the affairs. She had fretted over the commercial maxims of young men, the routine of laborious amusement, the inadequacy of prosaic life. Now, as she listened to this brilliant and eloquent youth, she thought that he had been born and bred in a world where everybody was exceptional. She enjoyed a vision of his wild and graceful father, who had exchanged a brilliant society, where none shone with such luster, for the pure, exciting air, the free life, and the silver dreams of Colorado. Any day he might strike his pickaxe on the sterile ground, and be richer than the Caliph of Bagdad, or Croesus, King of Lydia. Born in a family where wealth was a matter of course, Lady Gertrude thought that she despised money; but silver asleep in the mountain till the prospecting prince should come

made her eyes brighter and her red lips open in wonder. And there were other figures, too, who made a most heroic appearance in John's tale. This huge and simple guardian, of whom the young man spoke with an engaging mixture of patronage and tenderness, seemed to the girl like a gigantic Norseman, with eyes like wintry blue and beard like the yellow corn. She could imagine the grand, simple faith of such an one in this brilliant youth, whom it was his privilege to start in life. And, as John spoke of the friend who had been his comrade at school and in holidays, the girl began to think of Jonathan and David, of the greatness and beauty of friendship. She was under a charm. Why, she asked herself, should not a woman be a man's friend, and the best of all possible friends? John said nothing of Letty, who had been his good friend too.

John talked charmingly, and found the richest pleasure in talking to this lovely lady in this sumptuous place. The place and the hour, the easy winning of a friend so rare, the delightful confidence, the glow of a new life affected him like wine. His words came warm to his lips, and only stammered when his eyes met hers. The girl was delighted. Had she not suddenly remembered the cold glances of the Duchess, she might have sat in a corner with this picturesque talker so long that her cool judgment would have disapproved.

John, before he slept that night, allowed himself to play with the pretty notion that, perhaps after all, a state of society which was to be on its trial would

find its best excuse in that it made possible a splendid flower of girlhood.

John slept well, and woke to wonder if any particular thing had made him so happy. He pulled up his blind and opened his window wide, that lying in bed he might look across the spacious courtyard and see beyond the great florid iron gates the wide park stretch away like a green county under the spring-tide blue. His heart grew great, and he laughed with a sense of expansion. Then he thought with a sigh that people would feel a keen regret when such princely places were no longer possible. His mind was very active. After all, why should they not be possible? If the profits which the world affords are unfairly divided, perhaps it was not the landlords who got too much, but rather the manufacturers and merchants. And these merchants and manufacturers did not enrich their fellows by making such things of beauty as Boucherett, but only overloaded the groaning earth with new monuments of ugliness and ostentation. Perhaps the first action of the reformer should be to defy the musty precepts of the political economist, and to insure fair wages for the workman. Perhaps the landlords might be taught to help the workmen against the capitalists, and so gain for themselves a new period of dignified and noble life. Schemes came to the quick-thinking youth as he lay in bed, schemes of decent dwellings for the poor of the towns, of healthy amusement, of open spaces and pure water. Let the landed folk admit the virtue of trades' unions, and let the trades' unions accept the

friendship of the landlords, and the vulgar capitalist would have to be content with less profit. The friendship of a new and wise nobility, with a free and enlightened people, was a captivating idea. John broke short his chain of idle fancies with a laugh. He found that he was thinking the thoughts of a new sort of Tory; he remembered that he was a daring Radical. Well, after all, no man should bind himself at the outset of life in the complete buckram of a party creed. It was a morning which suggested an open mind. John was delighted with his quick thoughts, his clear, quick visions. It could not be said of him, he felt, that he could take but one point of view. Who could better venture to let his lively mind play round a subject, for who was surer than he of a solid foundation of sound public morality?

There came a tap at the door, and John's pleasant musing was presently changed to annoyance. The servant to whose care he had been assigned stood by his bedside with a telegram. John tore it open, and in a moment his face was full of vexation. He would send no answer, and as soon as the man had gone, he jumped out of bed and spread the offending telegram flat on the little writing-table. It was from Colonel Brent, and was very short. "Come home, if you can," the Colonel had written, and no more. John was made angry by this characteristic brevity. He declared that it left him no choice. Of course he could go to Brentholme. It was absurd of Colonel Brent to give him no reason; it was treating him, a member of Parliament, a man to whom the guests of

Boucherett showed much consideration, as if he were a child incapable of rational choice. While he washed and dressed himself, he was inclined for each alternate minute to write for further information and meanwhile to wait where he was. However, he was sure that the right thing was to go at once, and that he would do the right thing. He always did the right thing.

When he announced after breakfast that he had been summoned by telegram, he looked straight at the eyes of Lady Gertrude, and he felt a thrill of pleasure as he read in them an annoyance equal to his own. It would have been more flattering to him if she had tried to hide her feeling; but her voice touched its highest point of fretfulness as she declared that something always happened to spoil her party. She was plaintive; she thought herself for the thousandth time the sport of a capricious destiny. She sighed as she poured out a cup of tea for a late comer; she snubbed her father, who was curious about one of the day's details, which she had settled twelve hours ago, and she told him not to fuss.

"The brougham will take you to the station," she said to John, as if broughams and stations had been created alike for her peculiar annoyance. She sighed as she told him the time of his train, as if it were started at the one minute of all the day which was most inconvenient for her.

The last thing which John saw as he was carried away was Lady Gertrude's face still eloquent of the certainty that the world was arranged for her particular disappointment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

To John Maidment's eyes the chalk slopes of Brentholme looked bare, the hall chilly, and the morning-room, into which he strode, threadbare and faded. The Colonel's man, who had grown old in the service of the family, went slowly in search of his master, and it was not long before the Colonel appeared. Indeed, he had a strange tale to tell, and, since it seemed to his own discredit, he would lose no time in the telling. He told it boldly and barely. He said that he had lost a great deal of money, or at least so much that it was a heavy loss for him.

"I made a foolish investment," he said, "in something American ; and as I shall have to give back a great part of my rents of this year, I must spend less for a time." He began very gruff, and seemed to draw up his words from his very boots, as he said that he should try to let the place for a few years. The statement seemed to stick in his throat. "The boys must leave school for a year or more," he added, "and try a tutor. He smiled grimly, thinking perhaps that Jacky, Teddy, and Dicky were well made for the trial of tutors ; but there was no answering gleam of a smile in John Maidment's eyes. John was waiting with ill-disguised impatience till the statement of plans should touch his own career. "Paul," continued the Colonel, "will decide for himself. Perhaps he will stay in America for a while. He has found a friend who wants him to join him in cattle-breeding. He has as



you know, a little money, which came to him from his aunt Susan. He knows that I have been losing money ; he will soon know how much."

"Then you told Paul." John's sense of injury fastened on this fact. "I wish you had told me," he added almost in the same breath.

"I hoped not to tell you at all," said the Colonel after a minute, while only the flush on his fair skin showed the pain which he felt. "Things might have taken a better turn. Can you do with a hundred a year less—for this year at least?"

What internal convulsions had preceded this curt, cold question, nobody in the world would have guessed. John had no conception of the sufferings of this great healthy man, who expressed himself with so much difficulty. He was aggrieved, and did not care to hide it.

"Of course I must do it," he said. His thoughts came and went fast. He had been kept in the dark most foolishly ; the Colonel should have asked his advice long ago ; the Colonel had been extraordinarily foolish. He thought that Mr. Randall would have considered his advice worth the trouble of asking, and with that thought his quick mind was back at Boucherett. He had a vision of a life where no trumpery hampering considerations of expenditure need be. If he were not to some extent bound— Was he bound ? He was obliged to come back to the present moment, for there was his guardian standing solid and silent before him with his chin pushed upward and outward. "Of course," said John again, "I must do with less

money ; I have no claim ; it is for you to decide. I only wish that you had told me, that you had given me the chance of being of some help, however small. I wish I had known."

Colonel Brent opened his mouth as if he would speak, but he shut it again and slowly went out of the room. He went to look for his daughter. Letty was sitting on a gate ; she looked unusually meditative ; she had been regarding the familiar fields and trees through tears which came unbidden with the thought of leaving Brentholme even for a single year. She felt an unreasonable dislike of the people who would take the place : there might even be a girl who would dare to have her favorite views and favorite corners ; the idea was insupportable ; she was sure that the girl was horrid. Nevertheless, she looked up at her father with a smile. She was very sorry for him ; she was sure that somewhere under his great silence and his stoical face there was deep sorrow.

"John is in my study," he said, looking over her head.

It was not much which he said, but the girl was in the habit of finding a great deal in her father's curt sentences. She read in this one that John was out of spirits and that she was to go to him, and she read in it too with a throb of the heart that it was recognized that she was the person whose duty and right it was to comfort this young man of genius. She descended from her gate with a new gravity in her face, and she stood a-tiptoe to kiss her mighty father before she went slowly toward the house.

Letty had not reached the house before she met John walking quickly, and speaking even more quickly to himself. She could see his lips moving before he saw her, and the sight roused a little opposition in her, which made her hesitate. John Maidment was a wonderful creature, so clever and so handsome; she had always admired him so much; it ought to be such a privilege to help and console him. He looked the hero of romance, but for some unlucky reason on that morning she could not feel romantic. And yet it was determined: she was the being who was to be dedicated to the consolation of this youth—had she not dedicated herself? She tried to feel the full dignity of her mission—how great a thing it was that he should care for her. If only some one of her young brothers had been near to criticise John, she would have found in his defense the necessary warmth; she would have met him then with a glow of loyalty. As it was, she was half inclined to run away.

John Maidment, who was not thinking about the girl's thoughts, had hardly pressed her hands in his before he began those criticisms of the Colonel with which he was overflowing. He told the girl too often that the lessening of his allowance was nothing, that it was not that which hurt him. Letty grew colder and colder, and as silent as her father.

"I'm not greedy," said John; "I think I may say that. Of course it is extremely hard to live in London and do the various duties which a member of Parliament is bound to do on so little; but that is nothing; I make no complaint of that."

"Of course not," she said with difficulty.

"Although it will be very inconvenient—there is no good in attempting to say that it won't be very inconvenient."

"It's harder for my father!" she said more clearly.

"Of course it is harder for him, but why didn't he consult me? Why did he keep me in the dark? It is that which I can't get over. He must have been speculating so foolishly—even now he tells me no particulars—it's treating me like a child. Of course it's hard for him, but what has he done with it?"

"You ought not to ask," she said sharply, and with a little nod of her head.

"Don't be absurd!" he said angrily.

"Thank you." She stood a moment looking at him, and then with her little head in air she walked into the house, and having passed beyond his sight ran up-stairs, almost stumbling in her haste, that she might lock herself into her room before the tears came flowing. It was thus that she executed her mission of consolation.

For the remaining hours of that lagging day there was little ease for the small party gathered at Brent-holme. They avoided each other, and if there was no quarreling, there was very little talk; and so at last bed-time came and silence was no longer awkward.

The next morning Letty woke full of happiness and wondered why. Beyond the dimity curtains with their faded well-washed rosebuds, she felt the fresh-

ness of the dewy morning and heard the tumultuous babble of the thronging birds. But these delightful trifles of the day were only charms of the old place which she was to leave ; they should have made her sad. And a doubt would come and come again whether she had been kind and patient enough. She felt that she ought to be sad ; she sighed conscientiously, but her spirits would not be denied. Out in the air she grew happier and happier ; she was bound to nothing ; she was free. She was filled with the ecstacy of freedom ; it seemed wrong ; it was not what she had meant to feel ; and so at last a great sob surprised her, and she began to cry.

A little later on John Maidment was flying to London and thinking, whether he would or no, of money. He had never fully realized the importance of money. He perceived that he ought to think about it. He wondered if Lady Gertrude would have much. Suddenly he was shocked—where were his thoughts going to ? He had a vision of Letty—what would she think of his mind being busy with money ? His conscience had sprung up uneasy ; he attacked it with fury, with a passionate declaration that he had been treated infamously. If he were thinking of money, is it not absolutely necessary for the independence of the modern politician ? He only wanted money that he might work, as Nature meant him to work, effectively for the public good : he was sure that he was right to want it ; he need not fear that he would ever yield to any temptation to gain it by unworthy means. How quick his conscience was to take alarm ! He had been ready to

blame himself for thoughts which a moment's consideration showed to be most sensible. But he was glad that his conscience was so sensitive. He could go forward without fear, for his conscience would not let him stray an inch from the path of duty. What a safeguard was that !

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## CHAPTER XIV.

THE first year of John Maidment's Parliamentary life was uneventful. There was a great deal of talk and very little law-making ; and though the young orator cared little for the Bills which had to be abandoned, he was much disappointed by the quality of the talk. It seemed to him that the most loquacious members, if they spoke less pompously than his old friends at the Union, spoke less fluently also. They had the air of hesitating, as if the matter of their remarks was so important that a wrong word would be fatal, and yet with all their hesitations and repetitions it was not generally a very valuable thought which finally struggled to the light. John sometimes thought with a thrill that when he unlocked his lips he would treat this audience to something better ; but then always followed the chilling doubt whether those who liked this spasmodic method would have the good taste to admire his richer eloquence. Sometimes, as he sat dreary on a dull night in the House (and there were a great many dull nights

in that year), he told himself that it was not worth while to shine among such a lot of stammerers ; and, as he looked round on the half-empty benches, the slouching bodies and the faces distorted at short intervals by wide ostentatious yawns, he compared the scene with his old visions of the great arena, and felt the full bitterness of the contrast. However, though his view of the House was by no means respectful, John was wise enough to keep his opinion to himself. Moreover, he cleverly made use of his disillusion to strengthen his purpose of not making a speech that year. He had meant to keep silence for a while, and he was glad that the temptation to let his words flow was weaker than he expected. So he began to acquire among the few political people who seemed to notice him a reputation for constant attendance and attention, and for a respectful attitude to the Senate of his country.

Mr. Maidment was dissatisfied. After the first excitement of London life he suffered from a natural reaction ; he began to think himself neglected. The chiefs of his party seemed scarcely aware of his existence. Mr. Stanley Belchamber was the only one of the leading men who showed any wish for his better acquaintance, and this one loudly explained his desire not by any expectation of the young member's political qualities (at their first meeting he pretended to forget to which party John belonged), but by his lively recollection of the escapades of Mr. Maidment the Elder. He declared that he and Wilfred Maidment had been boys together, that they had heard the

chimes at midnight, had been sworn brothers in many a wild adventure.

To hear him you would suppose that this worthy man, whose University first class had been followed by years of the patient study of Blue-books and "Statesmen's Year-books," and by the conscientious staring at details furnished by the permanent staffs of various departments, had been Prince Hal and Don Juan, and that the study where he had worked with unflagging industry had been ornamented with the knockers of half the fat citizens of London. As he rose in the world, he had been more and more offended by his reputation for blamelessness. If he must submit to the reputation of excellence as a public servant, he could at least struggle against that of private virtue. He took to swearing with premeditation; he went in search of improper stories, and, above all, he delighted in references to his younger days and to that dashing swashbuckler in whom he half believed as his former self.

So John found himself used as a peg on which were hung wild anecdotes of his father and his father's friend who had been barely an acquaintance, and, though he would have forgiven the slight to his own claims for the sake of the praises of his parent, whom it was part of his creed to admire extravagantly, he did not like the stories which gave to the gay doings of the brilliant Wilfred a coarser and more common air than he chose to accept. He decided that the coarseness was due to the coarser medium through which the tales reached him, but it gave him a mild dislike



of the only prominent member of his party who paid him any attention.

John's discontent with his party made it easier for him to contemplate with equanimity the fact that he was not to support them in carrying the Reform Bill. This great measure was still a matter of some future session; and meanwhile John lost no fitting opportunity of privately saying that it would not have his support. He wished to break his fall, to prevent the shock of an unpleasant surprise. There were a few young men in the House who were Liberals because their ancestors had believed in freedom of speech and trial by jury, and these began to look on the attractive Maidment as an acquisition. They, too, were discontented with their leaders, and their new friend found pleasure in their free criticism of the men with whom they voted.

There were other influences too which more directly drew John from his party. While his own chiefs paid him scant attention, he was complimented by finding himself an object of interest to one of the ablest of their opponents. Mr. Randall cultivated him, asked him to breakfast in the Albany, even asked his advice. He at least had an adequate conception of the importance of the ideas, right or wrong, of the young men; and he listened to John with apparent respect and very real interest. And there was a more flattering, a more dangerous influence than that of Mr. Randall. Among the social attentions which the young man received, none were so pleasant or so frequent as those which came from Boucherett

House. There he met pleasant men and charming women, who seemed to accept his radicalism as a piquant peculiarity; he enjoyed the atmosphere of the nicest house in London, and the knowledge that he was a lucky fellow to enjoy it so often. Lady Gertrude had accepted him as full of generous enthusiasm, as vastly interesting; she had almost inflated him to heroic size. For the disappointments of his first session there was no compensation equal to that which he found in the society of the Whimley intimates, and especially in that of the handsome daughter of the house.

John Maidment recognized the fact that his enthusiasm for his great party grew colder day by day, but he scarcely thought either of the indifference of its leaders or of the attentions of its enemies as causes of his growing coldness. These he saw at moments with a passing glance; but to him there was one cause, which alone was enough to explain his disenchantment and to make his aversion a virtue—the want of faith. That Tories should have no faith had seemed to the young man at Oxford a matter of course; he had supposed that cynicism was the natural attribute of the Conservative who was not merely stupid. Plunged into the atmosphere of London he found the Liberals, whose acquaintance he made, more cynical in private talk than any of their opponents. He had imagined a great party full of faith in liberty, full of zeal for the raising and enlightening of their less fortunate countrymen; and he heard from the lips, which had filled halls and skating-rinks

with resounding praises of freedom and protestations of philanthropy, nothing more stimulating than stale cheap sneers at any one who believed in benefiting anybody but himself, or on rare occasions a shrewd hint how to play the game of politics. John told himself again and again that these men were cynical as a despot at a time of decadence, and would play concerted pieces on their Cabinet fiddles though the empire were in flames and the strong man starving in the street. John was vastly and constantly indignant with this cynical tone ; he felt its enervating power, its chilling and deadly effect.

It fully explained to him his growing aversion to the leaders of his party. He was never tired of denouncing to himself this fatal influence, and at last there came a time when his virtuous indignation could no longer be locked in his own breast, but after an evening of unusual provocation broke forth in indignant speech.

It was near the end of the season when John was surprised by an invitation to dine with Mr. Otho Sunderland. Mr. Sunderland's dinners were famous, and, though he had always taken a prominent place in the political world, his best attention was given to the selection of food and guests. The latter were always few and the former exquisite. Mr. Sunderland was still a comely man, whose skin retained a remarkable gloss and rosiness ; and if there was something pig-like in the lines of the face and the twinkle of the little eyes, it suggested an animal of a refined breed and one whose marvelous digestive powers had been

used with some regard to moderation. Moreover, if at the first sight of this hospitable gentleman the observer could not but think of his digestion, at the next he was bound to recognize his intelligence. Above the twinkling eyes, which were themselves very keen and vivacious, the head was strong and solid. If Mr. Sunderland was like a pig, it was a pig with the intelligence strongly and sanely developed. He was very rich ; he was a bachelor, and seemed happy in the state ; he had great political influence ; he had refused office. He appeared to enjoy all aspects of life, and one of the things which amused him most was the game of politics. At his little dinners he liked to entertain no one better than a Cabinet minister, unless it were a pretty and a witty woman. He had seen John in the House, admired his handsome vivacious appearance, and asked him to dinner. John accepted with pleasure, for he had heard of Mr. Sunderland's influence, and he was captivated by the compliment of an invitation to one of those banquets which were notoriously select ; and his pleasure was increased when he found that in the small party to which he had been bidden there were three Cabinet ministers and at least two of the prettiest women in London.

John prepared to be happy ; but to prepare to be happy, is to challenge disappointment. You build the palace of happiness stone by stone, and dullness sits heavy in every chamber : you go into the back-yard, and with a glint of sunshine over the wall happiness has kissed you and gone. John found himself

out of it. The ladies, who were undeniably pretty, and with eyes and teeth and laughter which were almost wit, were so busy with fascinating the more ponderous politicians that they scarcely seemed to notice that the new youth was good-looking, and the attentions of the magnates of his party were so casual as to be less complimentary than obvious contempt. A limp finger from Lord Allport and a galvanized grin on the tired face of Mr. Belchamber were all the signs that they recognized in Mr. Maidment a pledged supporter. John's contempt increased as the delicate feast went on. He asked himself why this elderly Sybarite had asked him? His lip curled at the pleasantries with which, to their own immense satisfaction, the politicians entertained the beauties. The insincerity of these public moralists filled him with disgust, the coarseness and clumsiness of their compliments. If the admirable artist who had made the *entrées* of the evening had had no finer taste in flavors, they might have been dining at a farmer's ordinary. And their equivocal compliments to the ladies were no worse than the jests which they rolled at each other. They told stories against each other and all were of one pattern. Each had a tale of some delinquency of the other. If you had believed them, you would have supposed that her Majesty's Ministers cared for nothing but gambling in railway carriages, following pretty women, and sneering at politics. Otho Sunderland beamed irresponsible; he led the talk; he gave it its greatest richness. Somebody spoke of the Radicals.

"Radicals!" he cried; "we are all Radicals. Hillingdon is Radical till you touch the land, Allport till you touch his monotonous pheasants; Simpson's a Socialist to the point of Sèvres china, and Belchamber to that of ladies' gowns. The ladies must have pretty gowns for Belchamber." Mr. Stanley Belchamber, in whose weary face the lines had been vanishing in that unctuous atmosphere, made ready to think of a *mot*, but the irresistible host passed on above him. "I shall dish you all," he said; "I shall lead the party yet; I haven't a taste I can't give up with a smile—not even the gowns." He gave a large smile to left and right and added, "No degree of Communism can prevent one woman from being prettier than another."

"Order, order!" cried Lord Allport for no particular reason and laughed immoderately.

"Otho doesn't stop at the gowns," said Stanley Belchamber, who had at last put together something which seemed witty. Perhaps it was witty, for they all laughed, and pretty Lady Skipmore whispered something to Mr. Hillingdon, and called him a cad when he threatened to repeat it.

"Don't reform away our pretty clothes," said lovely Mrs. Mullinger gravely; "we should be nothing without them."

Mrs. Mullinger had large soft eyes, and made the most simple remarks. Nobody knew if she meant to be funny, and, when her audience roared with laughter, she looked at them like a surprised dove.

As the wine began to take effect and the public

servants expanded more and more, the talk came faster and the jokes aroused more generous laughter. Hillingdon declared that Lord Allport had sold the future of the House of Lords to a beautiful Radical lady ; and Allport asserted that Hillingdon had failed to meet the local Three Hundred, whose mouth-piece he was, because he was so intent on robbing a bagman at *écarté* that he had passed the station unawares. "There he was in a first-class carriage with the blinds down pocketing the gent's last shilling, and there were his masters outside waiting for his defense of his monstrous and unpatriotic treatment of the great French Egg Question ; they'll never forgive him ; the seat's lost."

"Hillingdon," said Mr. Belchamber, "would make any place too hot to hold him."

"Ah !" cried Otho Sunderland ; "he may find that useful some day."

There was a pause before the laughter came ; there was a sort of shiver in Lady Skipmore's silvery laughter. Lady Skipmore had been born and brought up in one of the quieter towns of New England, and her first success in English society had been as the daintiest of Puritans ; but she was a clever little woman, and finding that in the set which struck her as the best a certain freedom of speech prevailed, she had drilled herself through a time of blushes to listen to amazing talk and to answer in the same key. "When you are in Rome," she said to herself, "you must talk as the Romans talk," and it was not long before she bettered her example. It was all talk with

Lady Skipmore, and the letters which she wrote to her relations in America were filled half with the names but not the talk of the prominent people among whom she moved, and half with the latest anecdotes of her babies.

John Maidment was vastly disgusted. The night was hot and dry, and when he left Mr. Sunderland's house he found small refreshment. On the stairs he had heard a burst of laughter, and felt certain that they were laughing at him. He would make some of them laugh on the wrong side of their mouths yet. He half resolved to start the crusade on the morrow—to set forth on a speaking tour, to stump the country, to lay bare to the deluded provincials the intimate opinions of these men, whose moral perorations had thrilled them in the daily papers. He remembered the time when he too had been thrilled, and he was furious with these men who had deceived him. "What do they think of me," he said aloud, "that they speak like that before me? Do they think me a fool—so weak that I can't hurt them?" He was deeply wounded. It seemed to him that he had never before seen in all its naked deformity the shameless cynicism of the political orators whose mouths were full in full political meetings of equity, philanthropy, morality.



## CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning John Maidment was engaged to breakfast with a genial young Whig of his acquaintance, and he was still so full of the impressions of the last night that he spoke eloquently and with feeling of the contrast between public professions and private beliefs; and, being met with some light objections and comments, he grew rapidly warmer and expressed himself with an earnestness and even with a passion which is rare at an English breakfast table. He made an excellent impression. His words were very effective, and some of the listeners were busy wondering if he might not be a power in the House. They wagged their heads at each other when he had gone, and said that he was a very earnest chap and had lots of go; and before he went his young host, wise as genial, had engaged him to come and speak to his constituents for him on some occasion before the next meeting of Parliament.

Some months passed before John's Whig friend claimed the fulfillment of his promise, and he responded to the summons like one awaking from a lethargy to a glorious day. He had not enjoyed these months of repose. He had stayed for the most part in his dull London lodgings, studying and doubting the usefulness of his studies; thinking of Brentholme which had already found a tenant, and telling himself that he had no place to go to; taking a doubtful pleasure in economizing. He pictured the Brent

family established in the Marine Parade of the quiet watering-place which was too near to their beloved home ; he did not want to go to them ; he was angry because they did not press him to come. He was angry too at the folly of the family. It was absurd that they should have got themselves into such a position with their pride and reticence. Why had the Colonel not confided in him from the first ? He asked himself the question again and again, though he was sick of it. He pictured Paul riding about after cows in Montana, and did not like the picture. Reminded of a promise which he had forgotten, and being called to speak at short notice in a small country town where he was unknown, his spirit leaped within him ; he felt the first stirring of spring ; he perceived that another time of political activity had come ; his speech was ready to flow. And his speech did flow indeed, and to such purpose, that the rumor of it spread beyond the petty place where it was delivered ; it was noticed by more than one of the London papers, and finally one passage of it was quoted in a leader of the "Times."

The chiefs of John Maidment's party had concocted a little measure for Ireland, and, after producing it with tender patronizing speeches, had been obliged to postpone it to the coming session. Upon this one of the entertaining experiments which are made upon the sister island John, sore with things in general, and especially with his leaders, allowed himself a free rush of indignant criticism. He did not suppose that he would be heard beyond the white-

washed walls of the Institute, and he thought that he might relieve his overcharged heart and hear no more of it. He did not mean to say much ; but the excitement of speech after long silence, the applause of his audience mingled with expostulatory grumblings of the most orthodox, and the unfeigned delight of his host, carried the young orator forward on a full stream. He touched briefly on former and larger measures for Ireland, and, after pointing out that the expected effect had not in each case followed, he held up the little piece of legislation which was to be now tried in its turn, and shook it and turned it inside out and flung it down with a fine scorn. "Let nobody suppose," he said, "that I look with disrespect on the author of this measure. He has produced a master-piece. With patient industry and a more than Machiavellian subtlety he has put together a piece of legislation so ingeniously framed that the good, which it can in the happiest circumstances effect, will be the least possible, and the disturbance which it can not but produce must be incalculable and irremediable. I congratulate her Majesty's Government. We are all warm supporters of her Majesty's Government."

Here he was interrupted by the warm applause of those who had been a little puzzled but now recognized a familiar signal for acclamations.

"We are all warm supporters of her Majesty's Government, and it is our privilege to recognize with the profoundest sentiments to what an amazing pitch of ingenuity her Majesty's Government can attain."

Here there was another burst of applause, but

some of the more wary were again puzzled and abstained and looked cunning.

"This little measure," said John in his sweetest tones, "so long expected, so fondly cherished, nursed so carefully in the recess, displayed so delicately in the session—this little measure has every fault which so small a creature can exhibit. Sent as yet another messenger of conciliation, it will conciliate no class and exasperate all; instead of the olive-branch it bears the fiery cross; it will embitter every cause of discontent in the country and will mitigate none. You have all heard of the physician who threw his patients into fits because he understood fits. It might almost be held by a cynical critic of measures such as these that the Government liked to throw Ireland into convulsions because they understood coercion bills."

It was this last illustration which was repeated by many people and which found its way into the leading newspaper. John thought little of it; it had occurred to him while he spoke, and had taken shape before he had criticised it; for some reason it had in it the element of popularity. It was fated to turn up again at an important moment and to have a startling effect on its author's career.

There was dull speech-making in the House of Commons. The little Irish measure had re-appeared, but shone with a fainter light. There was a general belief that it was doomed; it was rumored that it was a cause of dissension in the Cabinet, who, as one cunning gentleman asserted, were only unanimous in the intention of ascribing its loss to the obstruction of the

Opposition. Its success would have been a doubtful good ; its failure might be of value to its party. It is no wonder that debate on a matter so small and with so little vitality grew more and more languid. Even the heat of the Irish members required constant stirring, and the more humorous of them almost laughed in the midst of their denunciations. It was a night of boredom. Scattered on half-empty benches, legislators sprawled and yawned. Most of them had reached a time of life when monotonous oratory leads softly but surely to sleep. Viewed from the Strangers' Gallery the House invited a study of various degrees and sorts of baldness, for, save where here and there one peacefully slumbered in the shadow of his tilted hat, the members were uncovered. There was shiny baldness and fluffy baldness, bumpy pates with wisps of hair laid dexterously across, but scarcely one head thickly and honestly covered. They were the heads of elderly sensible persons, who had done the more serious work of their lives, some at ample desks in the City, some in the turnips or on the heather. Now, as their waists expanded, they seemed like men who were taking their ease, as Englishmen sometimes will, in the least easy manner possible.

But if to the great majority of members politics were obviously a matter of at least secondary importance, there was a fair show on both sides of the House of more earnest politicians. There were men who were young, as youth is reckoned nowadays, some on the sunny side of forty, others between forty and fifty.

Among these latter one might see the keen gray face of a lawyer, who had worked day after day from dawn to bed-time that he might be rich enough to enter Parliament, and who, having won his seat, was worrying himself with the fear that he had forced his mind into a shape too exclusively legal. With nervous face, disordered hair, dusty and gritty as his legal book-shelves, he sat twisting his long legs and spurring his jaded attention. There too was the grave rough face of a workmen's candidate, who wasted too much of his energy in the set purpose of showing that he held himself at least as good as his fine-haired neighbors; and next to him was the light fluffy hair and pale-eyed, self-satisfied, intelligent face of the political theorist—a theorist who had learned the general principles of legislation from books, as a child his catechism, and who spent his life in preaching them like a Dissenting minister and in measuring with his little accurate rules the rough-and-tumble law-making of his party. There too were the small body of the might-have-beens, cold, supercilious, critical of the efforts of their comrades, statesmen themselves had it been worth their while. There too, next to the well-fed, well-groomed, Otho Sunderland, who watched the game with a mild eupeptic interest, was the big head with staring eyes of the politician altogether serious. Destitute of humor, loving debate however dull, rushing in private life into discussion and explanation of old debates long gone by, retailing on no encouragement old House-of-Commons jests and anecdotes, proud of the least significant of

public offices, and looking up with respect to his colleagues in the Cabinet, the politician, who played the game as if he had one of his claw-like fingers in the management of the Universe, presented to the observant eye a strange resemblance to an unfinished eagle. And there were a few men really young, shining like the lilies of the field in a great company of potatoes, who proclaimed in every line of head and face, as in their clothes and boots, that they owed their seats to family influence. They were a strange gathering, and over all of them—the successful, those who might have been successful, those who struggled for success, drowsy elders and gilded youths alike, intellectualized pigs and unfinished eagles—hung on that night a double portion of dreariness. Dreariness was the very atmosphere of the scene. One might have thought that the speakers were condemned to fill so many columns of the morning paper. An orator stopped in the midst of his oration to yawn. A thought had been beaten thin in a newspaper article, and now the article was beaten thin in a speech. It seemed as if viands had been warmed up again and were served to people who had already supped too well. It had all been heard before ; they would have to hear it all again. The hearers sat like men who were undergoing a cure, condemned to sit and let words trickle over them, so many an hour, in a sort of bath of vapors. They were undergoing the word-cure.

John too was overwhelmed by the general dreariness. He sat hearing arguments, foreseeing the argu-

ment which was to come next, repeating like a machine the answer which had been given so often. He sat like a lonely pleasure-seeker at a dull play, the dialogue of which he knows by heart.

But on a sudden he was aroused from his lethargy. A speaker of the Opposition, who had been going on the familiar round, tired perhaps of ending his speech with his usual sentence of solemn warning, dropped an allusion to fits and coercion bills, and sat down. Two or three people, who were less near to sleep than their neighbors, looked at John and smiled. The Cabinet minister who rose to take his turn at the evening's solemn mockery turned as he rose and looked at John. The young member felt a sudden thrill of nervous excitement, but it grew faint as the great man began to repeat the familiar answers to the familiar criticisms of the last speaker. It was not until his task was done that he seemed to remember the young supporter who sat behind him ; and then, with an air of patronage and playfulness, he said a few words about the indiscretion of extreme youth.

There was a laugh, and John leaped in his seat. To be rebuked and patronized by one of these very men with whose flippancy he was so righteously angry ! To be ridiculed by a master of such clumsy forensic pleasantry ! John did not stop to think what he was doing ; he was on his feet before the minister had lowered himself to his place ; he met the recognition of the Speaker's glance ; he was making his first speech in Parliament. He heard his voice full and firm in the place ; he felt words and sentences ar-



range themselves before him ; the arguments were only too familiar, but his annoyance gave them life ; he was glad of his annoyance, for he spoke with fire, and knew that he was speaking well. The House began to fill rapidly ; members poured in to listen, and those who had been dozing on the benches sat up and forgot the immense tedium. John felt the growing interest, the delight of kindling admiration, the old stimulant of opposition. The criticisms of the small Irish measure sprang with new life to his lips, and, when he had made an end of these, he dared to pass to a wider view of the needs and distresses of Ireland, to a fine scorn of meddling injurious legislation, to a finer hope of honest and helpful reforms. He did not speak too long ; he trusted to his instinct ; he broke off when the sympathy of his audience was warmest.

“As for the allusion to my youth,” he said with an effective change of manner, “if indeed it could have been intended for so insignificant an individual as myself, I will not repeat yet again—trite answer to a trite accusation—that youth is a fault soon remedied. I will not affect to regret that I am young. I will only say that, when I am come to man’s estate, I hope that I shall know better than to mistake a worn-out historical taunt for an effective rebuke.”

When John sat down, the House was full of animation, and he heard the delighted acclamations of the Opposition.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

THE young man who wakes to find himself famous may be surprised to find how little way the trumpet of fame can carry. The servant-girl who trots upstairs with his tea and toast is aware of no change in his importance. The man who lives in the rooms below does not know his name; the man who lives in the attics above scorns him as a well-dressed idler. A friend and playmate of his childhood wonders vaguely, as he walks into the city, if the Maidment who seems to have made rather a good speech is any relation of the fellow whom he used to know at school; and he tries to remember if that was the way in which his friend spelt his name.

Still John was famous. His name was in all the papers, and his speech was fairly reported in some of them. At least two men stopped him in Pall Mall to congratulate him, and the sociable young Whig, for whom he had spoken at Easter, passed his arm through his and walked him up the pavement of St. James's Street with the air of an *impresario* who had brought out a successful prima donna. In Piccadilly, too, a very smart lady in a very smart carriage clapped her little gloved hands in a most knowing manner, and the next moment a Cabinet Minister's wife, who, as is the way with women, was a far more earnest partisan than her semi-cynical lord, glared at him like a political Medusa. John was not turned to stone: he felt that he had really made an impres-

sion ; he was aglow with life ; it was summer in all the air ; it was hard to believe that any place could be more delightful than the shady side of Piccadilly. Nor did John Maidment's reputation pass with the day. His attitude to his party was the text of leading articles and the cause of letters more or less indignant printed in the daily papers ; while at the week's end a whole article of a wise and good weekly Review was dedicated to the young member, who found himself admired and chided with the tender regret of the least narrow of maiden aunts. He had been naughty, but he was a very clever boy : it was by no means certain that he too had not some touch of genius.

These were brave days for the young man. He marked a daily growing flood of cards of invitation, and the more flattering tribute of little notes. Nods in the street were more marked ; people who knew him were glad to say so, and were apt to think that they had always known that he would make his mark. To make his mark—is it not a fine phrase ? To insist upon recognition, to cry aloud this is I who have done something. The uneducated person who can not sign his name makes his mark also, but that is another matter. It was the season, the time of the flood of frivolity, when every one in the world, the world who dress and dine and ride on glossy horses in the Park, was on the lookout for a novelty. "Tell us of some new thing," they seem to cry to each other ; "boredom is only half a length behind, and we must catch at something interesting

or be caught. Oh! my dear, is that the young man who made the wonderful speech or something? How clever he looks, and what eyes! My dear, you *must* introduce him to me." Charming women declared emphatically that they must know John Maidment. Little plots were made that they might meet him at luncheon. His manner was pronounced perfect. He was vivacious; his eyes were full of fire; it was often said of him that he was such a relief after all those young men who could not amuse themselves and took no pains to amuse anybody else.

It seemed to John as if all the world was kind to him except the magnates of his party. Cards came to him from their wives, but no personal attentions. They still preserved the attitude of superior beings and showed no sign of thinking him dangerous. The Cabinet of the day was composed of men unusually clever; they had dexterously defended many weak positions; they had reached the point of thinking that nobody outside their charmed circle was of much importance. As for this boy who had attacked them from the rear, when any one of them thought of him at all, he took care to be patronizing and contemptuous. John was angry; he felt the insolence of their attitude; he was sure that this ignoring of his powers was mere affectation—part of the awful insincerity which had shocked him so deeply already. He waited for his opportunity and attacked them again. As the session went on he made more speeches, spirited, effective, not too many. If his own side preserved more or less the air of indifference, the Opposition

grew more and more enthusiastic, and his words flowed apace under the combined stimulants of applause and indignation. Nothing could be more effective than his attitude of the enthusiast who had lost or was fast losing his cherished illusions. He looked the part; he felt the loss. He seemed to embody the ardent faith of youth. His voice trembled as, speaking for the young Liberals of his college days, he described their ardor for reforms, their trust in their leaders, their vision of the fairer day to be, and then, carried away by his feelings, contrasted the hopes of these young enthusiasts with the catch-vote compromises of judicious and skeptical politicians. It was John's best peroration, and he recognized with delight that he owed its vigor to his righteous indignation. He nursed this indignation; he kept his eyes fixed on the insincerities of the party leaders; he tapped them, and listened to the hollow sounds. While they turned a bold front to the world, was it not notorious that no one of them agreed with his fellows? If they were big with contempt of all who were outside of the charmed circle, were not all their best energies wasted in wrangling within it? What chance was there of an effectual policy from a collection of men who disagreed on the very aims to which their efforts should be directed?

More and more directly with each succeeding day did John Maidment's criticism of his chiefs lead him to a comparison of parties. More and more ready was he to declare that for useful reforms Liberals were not a whit more zealous than Conservatives. In his mo-

ments of leisure and solitude he reviewed the questions which were sure to arise, and considered what were the coming Liberal measures which he would be called upon to support. There was the extension of the franchise, but that he must put aside, for by the peculiar accidents of his case he was prevented from voting for any extension of the franchise. As for the land, he expected nothing from the present Government but a too probable meddling, which would produce nothing but general insecurity. Of that which is too often with unconscious humor termed "the abolition of primogeniture," moderate men of all parties expressed at times a mild approval, which was extended also to the abolition of tenants for life, and a cheapening and simplification of the methods of land transfer. For any more sweeping changes in land tenure were these ministers, of whom the majority were large landowners, likely to be in earnest—these ministers, who, as John had found to his sorrow, were earnest about nothing? All sorts of useful reforms were kept waiting because they were not of a kind to excite the sluggish imaginations of the mass of voters. The fairest river in the world ran foul and putrid through the richest city. Crowded on rotting floors and swarming on crumbling staircases, boys and girls grew up together with no chance of decency, no playground but the gutter, no protection for their youth.

As for these and other like matters, there was apathy enough in all quarters, but there was at least as much chance of their being dealt with by a Con-

servative as by a Liberal Government. Indeed, the first prominent politician, who had coquetted with a scheme for the improvement of the houses in which herded the London poor, was a Tory leader, who had incontinently drawn down upon himself the rebuke and ridicule of Liberal political economists. John Maidment said to himself again and again that the Opposition were at least more honest, and that from them there was more chance of obtaining useful, if unshowy, reforms. They were more honest; they made less pretense; they did not taint the air with their sham philanthropy, their windy protestations; they did not even go quite so far in pouring flattery, which they knew to be undeserved, upon their beguiled and injured countrymen. The comparison of parties, which always ended to the disadvantage of the party to which he belonged, exercised more and more the active mind of Mr. John Maidment.

One afternoon in the height of the season John sat brooding in his lodgings. The afternoon sun poured in, and gave an irritating importance to the cheap striped table-cloth, and a dazzling brilliancy to the glass pendants of the chimney ornaments. The blind was pulled up awry; a faint smell of cooking came up from below; the landlady's baby was fretful, and an inferior organ was jerking out "*La donna è mobile*" at the street corner. John was out of spirits. The world seemed dry and dusty as the July afternoon. He was sick of his recurring arguments on political parties, and as sick of that social success which he had tasted so eagerly. After all, his success

had been as nothing in comparison with that of the newest American girl, who had exchanged her triumphs as belle of Kansas City for the amazement and delight of the Courts of Europe. Even the enchanting Spaniard, who sang in the most proper drawing-rooms those songs of Spain which were suspected of being so awfully wicked, had been a greater celebrity. John pushed aside a pile of cards, with which the table was littered, and was half inclined to abjure society. His notes for an essay on the Water Supply of London seemed even less to the purpose ; it almost seemed as if a drought was the proper thing for this inferior Babylon. There was another pile of papers, which pleased him less than any. He had been extravagant in nothing, and yet he had spent too much money. He looked round the room and recognized his virtuous economy in living in a place so unlovely. He could think of nothing but hansoms, which could have rolled away with his pitiful allowance. What a shame it was that he, who had so many important matters on his mind, should be obliged to consider the price of a necessary cab or a pair of decent boots ! Nobody, he knew well, was less greedy of money than he ; but enough to save him from these sordid calculations—was he not justified in demanding of Fortune so little as that ? It was so iniquitous that a fine instrument should be blunted by base uses. If only he had been as little scrupulous as other men, he might by this time be in a position where he could put all thoughts of money on one side. He gave a great sigh, unlocked an old box which stood on the sloping floor



at his side and shoved the papers in, and, as he pushed them down, he caught a glimpse of a piece of writing, which made him pause. Forgotten in the old dispatch-box was a scrap of paper on which Letty had written some verses. He remembered the exact place in the old garden at Brentholme where he had caught her spouting the lines, and had made her repeat them, and he had condemned them as formless doggerel, and she had been highly indignant and had declared that they were like all summer to her, and that he knew nothing about it ; and afterward in a mocking mood she had written them out for him and bade him learn them by heart.

John thought that he was a great admirer of poetry, but he had got out of the way of reading it. Perhaps he had always liked it best when it was nearest to rhetoric. Certainly these lines of Coleridge, written in the half-formed girlish hand, struck him still as childish stuff :

But green leaves and blossoms and sunny warm weather,  
And singing and loving, all come back together ;  
And the lark is so brimful of gladness and love,  
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,  
That he sings and he sings and for ever sings he—  
I love my love and my love loves me.

A doubt flitted across the young man's mind if there were not something in this song after all, a certain freshness which changed the air of his stuffy London lodging. But it was the well-known writing which appealed to him more surely. As he held

the crumpled paper, his conscience leaped up like a Jack-in-the-box and began asking questions. Had he been too quick to leave the girl, who in his mental picture showed so fair? Had he not been wrong in writing so little to the Brents? Was she pining for him by the green breaking waves of the shore? How fresh and cool was the thought of the sea in that stuffy room above the narrow street! It would be sweet to breathe the salt air, if only for an hour, and sweet to see again the girl who perhaps was thinking at that very moment of him. He could see her eyes as they looked up and saw him coming. He would go, if only for a single day; he would rush in upon the Brent family in exile by the sea—yes, certainly, unless some duty, political or other, prevented him, he would go down by an early train on the very next morning. If it were not for the big ball he would go down that night; but he must go to the ball. It was one of the things to which everybody went who had a chance of going; and besides, he had told Lady Gertrude that he should be there. He had not seen Lady Gertrude for two whole days; and she had been so kind to him—the whole Boucherett family had been so kind—that he felt himself bound to stay for that one evening. To-morrow he would go; and he felt so virtuous after this good intention, that the heat and the dust and the problems and the bills seemed light as air; and, as the evening brought a grateful coolness, he went out to dine at his club with a quick step and a good appetite.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Now it happened that John Maidment at his club fell in with one of those young men who represent most clearly the reaction from the languid swells of twenty years ago or more. This was a very smart and sanguine young man, who was charged with an excess of vivacity, who prided himself on being on familiar terms with all sorts of people, and called almost all his male acquaintance by their Christian names.

"Ah, Johnny!" he said as he pinched Maidment's arm; "how goes it, and when is it to be, or are you still behaving badly?"

"What do you mean?" asked Johnny with a fine blush.

"Oh, of course—yes, yes—very prudent—doosid careful!" said the other youth. "Where are you going when the season's over? Not to Boucherett, of course?"

"I don't know what you mean," said John loftily, but his heart was beating. Was this outspoken person the echo of the speech of many? Was it possible that people expected this—that they had chosen him to make this imposing match? There was no girl in London of whom the world would naturally expect a more remarkable alliance. She was the striking figure of her family, and the family was one of the most powerful in England. She represented rank, and wealth, and political influence, and moreover she was beautiful. She had been so kind to him, so

frank in showing her admiration of his talent, her sympathy with his nobler views. Had she shown more than admiration, a warmer, deeper sympathy? His mind ran back over their friendship; he almost heard the rustle of her gown and felt the cordial pressure of her hand. It was too early for him to go to this ball yet; he had not seen her for two days—how would she welcome him? He would mark her welcome with a newer, keener interest. If something should prevent her from coming? He began to imagine hindrances. Personal friendships or local ties might take her to some dance less famous; she might be ill; all sorts of things might have happened in two days. He blamed himself for having lost sight of her. He was almost thinking of her as if it were possible that he might win her. Of course it was out of the question: of course, when it came to the point, she would not take him, or would not be allowed to take him. Besides, he was bound, or in some sort bound. Anyway, he need not think of it, for she would never accept him; he would not be such a fool as to think of it. Only he was glad that they would meet that night; it would be immensely interesting, exciting. He looked at the clock. How slow the time went! He could not go at eleven; he might be the first man in the room; he must wait a little. If it were not impossible on both sides, what a striking event it would be! How people would talk about it! He thought that he might go now.

There were plenty of people going up the stairs when John arrived at the ball. It was one of the

staircases of London, cool white marble and broad low steps, on which it was pleasant for ladies to move upward slowly with their plumage drawn softly after them. The lights were most becoming, the rooms large and lofty as the rooms of an Italian palace, and the handsomest women of the London world took care to wear the finest clothes and all their diamonds. It was an atmosphere which may be described as decorously intoxicating. John mounted the staircase, vivid brilliant and excited; about him was a glow and a murmur, and before him the unknown future.

When he had reached the doorway, John stood still and looked eagerly into the room; opposite to him was the lady who was filling his thoughts. She had come then. The long space of polished floor was empty between them, for the crowd had not come. The girl's head was turned aside, as she spoke to the Austrian attaché, with whom she was going to dance; she did not see John; for a few moments he could gaze at her and wonder. She had never been so beautiful. She was almost pale; much of her splendid color had gone, and she looked the lovelier. She was all in white; she was dressed more like a young girl than usual; she was full of strength and grace, but she was certainly paler. As John stared at her, she turned her head and met his gaze; he thought that the great dark eyes were softer. She bowed slightly, rather haughtily, but he was sure that the color deepened as she bowed. Some feeling made him draw back; he went out again and stood at the top of the stairs, watching the gowns come curling up, and the

smiles and nods of gracious heads. As he stood musing, a lady of his acquaintance spoke to him, and, as he answered her, he went at her elbow into the room. There she asked him a question, and then, with a light musical laugh, she said, "You ain't listening. I see where your eyes are. I'm not a bit angry; follow your eyes."

"Shall I?" said John laughing, and walked across the floor. Was everybody saying the same thing? Had he given them cause to think it—given her cause? It was like fate. What a prize she looked! His thoughts were going apace as he bowed before Lady Gertrude. She was certainly different—a little prouder, a little stiller, but also a little softer. Though her words were complaining, they lacked their proper sharpness and emphasis.

"You never come to see us," she said, "since you became such a celebrity; why should you? There are so many people so much more interesting."

John vowed that, if he did what he liked, he would come every day, every hour. She did not want to dance. There was a charming cool corner in this luxurious house, where was a palm-tree and lattice-work as oriental as the palm-tree; and several observant persons, who passed by the place, noticed that Lady Gertrude sat idle there, while a handsome and impetuous young man, whom some of them recognized as a rising member of Parliament, seemed to be speaking with an animation unusual in Englishmen. John caught a glance now and then, which was full of meaning to him, and heard a whisper and

a woman's laugh. His vanity was on fire. It must be that the world thought that this fine flower was his to take or leave, as he thought best. It must be true; she must care for him. What other cause could there be of this new gentleness, this adorable softness of a creature so proud and splendid? He looked at her, and she would not meet his eyes; he leaned toward her speaking eagerly, and she was silent; he heard his own voice full of emotion, and felt that she was moved by its music. What a prize to gain! How men would envy the man who won her! At the thought he looked up and saw Algy Garner stop short not twenty yards away, and glare at him with an open rage which was almost like a blow. Mr. Garner had as little concealment as a savage. He was a savage. He turned away without a nod. John looked after him, and his face was eager, radiant, triumphant; he felt his power and the joy of the conflict.

When John woke the next morning, he asked himself if he were bound or free. Certain words which he had said to the girl just before their parting were as clear to him as if they were written on his wall; but he could not tell how much they had meant—how much she had taken them to mean. He had no room for any other thought, and he was glad to thrust all other thoughts away. He had clean forgotten that on that morning he had intended to visit the Brents in their new home by the sea; yesterday's purpose seemed to have been no more than a passing idle fancy. There was only one thing for him to do.

He must see Lady Gertrude as soon as possible. He would see at a glance, in the mere look of her greeting, how much she had taken his words to mean, or how little—whether he were still free or bound. He half hoped that he was bound; that at least would end all doubts and hesitations. Moreover, he foresaw, though he would not recognize the thought, that he would say to himself that he had drifted into this affair, that he had not deliberately made up his mind to transfer his affections to Lady Gertrude and to think no more of that other girl, who had been so much to him in his boyhood. Had he gone too far for going back? Was he bound? The hours seemed leaden-footed; he could scarcely get through the day till the time came when he might call with a fair chance of finding Lady Gertrude at home.

At last the hour came. As he followed the footman up-stairs, he thought that he could hear his heart beating like a drum; he moistened his lips lest he should not be able to utter a syllable. He had to cross a long space of noiseless carpet; the afternoon light was shaded. He saw that the girl was alone; as she rose to receive him, he looked eagerly at her face. In a moment came a great feeling of relief; she greeted him as usual. He sank into a chair, smiling, with a full sense of well-being. He was delighted that she was so large minded, so generous, so noble. He could not see the slightest difference in her look or manner. He was sure that a meaner woman would have made him speak plainly for the satisfaction of refusing him, if not for the joy of accepting him.



Would she have accepted him? He wondered and forgot to speak.

"My mother is asleep in her den," said Lady Gertrude; "they will wake her when they bring tea." Then she went on to talk of the trifles of the day and hour with perhaps a little more hurry than usual, and John found himself engaged in a little five o'clock conversation which began to irritate him. He began to think she was a little too cool. Was it possible that her air of unconcern was neither proper pride nor generosity, but merely the result of inattention to those words of his? He had fancied that her mind had been busy with those words for the last sixteen hours; and perhaps she had scarcely noticed them. He was uneasy; his vanity was alarmed; he was sick of this chitchat. He felt that he must make her show a little consciousness that some words had passed between them, some words of more meaning than this thin society babble.

Almost before he was aware, his voice grew more tender, his talk more personal. He drew his chair nearer; he saw her color deepen. Then came a pause, and then, obedient, as it seemed, to some external impulse he said, "Have you forgotten what I said last night?"

As the words were finished, he realized that they were the very words which he had meant not to say. He remembered that only a few minutes before he had been relieved because she seemed to have ignored his last night's speech. There was no going back again; he rushed on; he was eloquent, as he could not help

being ; he had not meant to do this, but he felt that he was doing it well. She made no attempt to ignore his words now ; her blush grew deeper ; she could not raise her eyes. His voice trembled ; he took her hand in both of his.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

IN London at the height of the season there are so many things of no importance which must be done, that there is little time for comfortable leisurely criticism of our neighbors' mistakes. Every day, almost every hour, brings its event, which demands a passing ejaculation, and a good lady's mouth has scarcely lost the shape of her last " Oh ! " when it has to be opened again for a new " Ah ! " While one gossip is freeing her soul of what she " really must say " about Lady Blank's last flirtations, the other is inattentive, waiting impatiently with Miss Dashaway's last engagement on the tip of her tongue.

Thus one event drives out another, and the leaves fall so fast that the social gardeners can not sweep them into convenient heaps. It is only in long mornings in country-houses, when the crude males are shooting, or in long twilights by the fire, when the same men are stretching their legs in the smoking-room after a day's hunting, that the women have time to review the past season, and to give to each of

its events that degree of attention and criticism which is its due. Then with their delicate organs they touch and discriminate, they wonder and regret, and ever and anon some British matron of the hardier type gives a spade its real name and with it lays a fragile reputation level with the sod.

Not even the engagement of Lady Gertrude Bookham could receive its proper attention in July. Things were hurrying to a close ; girls were counting the dances which remained to them ; young men were proposing or planning departure ; their elders, mindful of past dinners, were looking trustfully toward Homburg. An engagement, even the engagement of the only daughter of the House of Boucherett, could by no means be a nine day's wonder. Nine hours, and those in the minutest fragments, were all that anybody could spare to the consideration of anybody's chances of married happiness. Still a great many people in passing had a remark to make about John Maidment's luck. "The chap hasn't a penny." "Hasn't he a father somewhere? Something shady, obliged to live abroad—Boulogne or somewhere. Uncommon clever fellow—bound to get on." Among politicians of all classes the engagement seemed to excite far more admiration of the young member than his success as a speaker. They wagged their heads at each other, and seemed to imply that it took a born politician to be as clever as that. The event was a great deal talked about for the time of year.

If Lady Gertrude's nearest relations did not talk much more about the affair than the hurrying outside

world, it is probable that they thought a great deal more. Her placid mother did not think it worth while to discuss it, because, as she frankly said, it would make her uncomfortably hot, and, when all was said, Gertrude was sure to have her own way. She did not like the marriage. The young man was poor and seemed not to belong to any one in particular, but she did not object to him much for those reasons. It was true that in her young days they did not marry that sort of young man ; but times were changed, and she accepted the changes and still found herself comfortable. She pronounced a deliberate opinion that her future son-in-law would get on, but she doubted if he would make a good husband. Met thereupon with emphatic assurances that John's private character was the great point in his favor, she said that she had no doubt of his virtues, but that she was not sure that she liked young men who were "not like other young men" ; that for her part she had always rather liked other young men. Lady Gertrude was mightily indignant with her mother, and scolded her at intervals with as much effect as if she were boxing with a pillow ; Lady Whimley yielding and soon smooth again, and her daughter rather red and out of breath.

As for the Earl of Whimley and Boucherett, that magnate was quite happy when the necessary interview with the young man was over. His wife had assured him with a comfortable chuckle that it was quite impossible to request his valet, who always arranged everything so well, to receive Mr. Maidment's proposals. She was delighted ; she thought that no-

body but her husband was capable of such an idea ; she shook with silent laughter whenever she thought of the valet. So Lord Whimley was much occupied by the necessity of seeing the young man, and of bearing himself with proper dignity during their interview. If Gertrude wanted to marry Mr. What-d'ye-call-him, there was no good making a fuss about it ; he supposed that he could get his son-in-law something, though there were not so many things to be had nowadays. He felt, however, that it was his duty to be as impressive as possible, and that there were certain things which he would be expected to say with an impressive manner. He felt that Bookham would be annoyed if he came back from the Antipodes and found that his father had not done the thing in the proper way. He slipped out and went down in a hansom to Mr. Randall, who showed no surprise, spoke well of the young man, and gave satisfaction without giving advice ; by Mr. Randall he was pushed onward to the family lawyer, who suggested a few phrases, and who understood with exhilarating readiness what sort of provision should be made for the daughter of the House.

After this, Lord Whimley prepared to receive Mr. Maidment. He chose the library, for it was very dignified and rather dark. The walls were covered with old Spanish leather, dark wood, and well-bound books, relieved at intervals by rich paintings and silver sconces ; the heavy carved furniture gave to its owner a comforting feeling of solidity. He stood before the great empty fire-place, and with the help of a long

piece of string bore himself bravely in the contest. John behaved beautifully ; he had been by no means sure that he would not be sent about his business ; he was equal to either fortune ; he showed most proper feeling. Lord Whimley got on capitally. The lawyer had said more than once that "a lady in Lady Gertrude's position must live in a certain style." The phrase was most useful, and her father insisted on the style in which Lady Gertrude must live, so amiably and so often, that John found himself graciously consenting that his future wife should be a comparatively rich woman. Lord Whimley wrung his hand, and being by the movement reminded of his bit of string, proceeded to show him a new form of cat's-cradle ; then he recovered his dignity, and said some more of the style in which Lady Gertrude would be expected to live, venturing timidly some words about ponies. Finally, as he felt that the end was in sight and all well, he confided to his future son-in-law an amazing funny story of his own proposal to her ladyship.

John Maidment, when he had parted from Lord Whimley, perceived with wonder that his fate was sealed. He regarded himself as the victim, whether for good or for ill, of Fate. It seemed almost impossible that he, John Maidment, was about to make this marriage ; it suited him to let himself slide, to be the victim of Fate. He was surprised to find himself so calm. His conscience scarcely made itself felt. His contact with the world, especially his daily contact with the political world, had strengthened his habit of regarding himself as far more scrupulous

than his fellows. Every day he had been contrasting himself with the cynical men who played the game of politics, until he saw himself more clearly than ever as the *Scrupulous Man*. It was only the tenderly scrupulous man who would have doubted for a moment if he were not in some sort bound to a girl who had repulsed him. He was not afraid to think of Letty; he said to himself that it would not do to be afraid to think of Letty. He pointed out to himself that Letty had not wished to marry him; he would think no more of her; it would not be right to think any more of her. So he determined to think about her and not to think about her; and meanwhile he thought about her. He could only keep telling himself that this thinking about Miss Brent was another proof of an over-sensitive conscience. On the whole he was calm; and, if a sudden rush of doubts came to him, he told himself how lucky he was—how much men envied him—how fine a girl he was going to marry. And the rush of all things around him helped him; it was easy to feel himself dragged into the rapids and swept along, excited, irresponsible.

John's most painful moments were those in which he composed the inevitable letter to Colonel Brent. This was his first duty; he would not shirk his duty; the Brents must not get the first news of his engagement from the "*Morning Post*." He had never found such difficulty in writing; he was discontented with the letter when it had gone; he felt sick as he opened the Colonel's answer. Colonel Brent's letter was very short.

"I trust," he wrote, "that you will let me know if I can at any time help you in any way. I wish I could increase your allowance, but that is still impossible. We are all well, and all unite in wishing you every happiness. I hope you will be a kind husband. I think that women can not stand unkindness as we can."

There was very little more than this, and John, though he was a little impatient of this extreme continence, was relieved.

"We are all well, and all unite in wishing you every happiness."

So Letty knew, and she was well, and she wished him joy.

The next post proved to him that he had not decided too quickly; it brought a few lines from Letty herself—a few commonplace lines.

"I thought that I must write myself," her brief note said: "I do wish you joy with all my heart."

"With all my heart!" John found the words coming back to him with irritating persistence, as he walked the streets. He went every day to visit Lady Gertrude, but to-day, though he was on his way to her feet, he walked down a great many streets, which did not lead directly to her abode. He told himself that he wanted exercise. Finally he turned into his club; he had remembered that he must answer some notes of congratulation.

In the club, which was kept in a cool and decorous twilight, he was sitting with his hat on, staring



at the empty grate, with a sheet of note-paper before him, when he heard a fragment of talk.

"What does she want to go and marry a beastly Radical for?" asked somebody.

"My good chap," said another young man, who was well-informed, "he has only got to skip across the floor; it's as easy as lying. I happen to know it's as good as settled. He is to go over on his wedding-day, and to stand at the next election as Conservative candidate for the county with Bookham."

"Well, I always heard he was a beastly Radical," said the first speaker, who had a good piece of obstinacy in him.

"Ah, you hear a lot, old chap; you have all the best information, and you are always broke. You are one of the knows—and wouldn't you be a Radical, or a sweep, or a Turk, or anything else if it would help you to an heiress?"

"Indeed I would," said the obstinate one relenting.

John heard the door swing as the two youths departed, but he still sat gnawing his thumb and frowning. What right had anybody to say that he was going to leave his party? And for such reasons! That is what the world would say if he were to—How infernally stupid people were! Against stupidity, as some one had said, even the gods fight in vain. The fact that his wife belonged to a Tory family would have nothing whatever to do with it, if he ever should— Were there not reasons enough for leaving the Liberal party? They were full of fine professions

and effected nothing, spendthrift with economy in their mouths, blood-guilty and crying peace, peace ! interpreting the cause of the people as the art of coaxing voters. There were a thousand good reasons why an honest man (and he was at least an honest man) should leave the Liberal camp—a camp of peace-professors. It was irritating beyond endurance to think that, if he should ever be driven to leave his party, stupid dunderheads would see no reason for his action but his alliance with the House of Boucherett. Alas ! that people were so stupid—so cynical—so sure to see no motives but the basest. John, as he got up without having written a line, declared to himself that he needed no alliance to insure his success ; that he could do well enough without the Boucherett interest. He looked at his watch, saw that Lady Gertrude had been expecting him for the last half-hour, and so dashed out of doors and hailed a hansom.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

MORE than a year had passed since John Maidment's marriage. Another season was dead, with its rush, roar, and restlessness ; another session had gone with its nights of poured-forth repetitions and its little burden of doubtful legislation. John had been more quiet in the House, but, when he uttered, he had appeared for the most part as searching critic of

Government measures ; and it was now generally believed that he would offer himself as a Conservative at the next election. If the Reform Bill, which had been so long looming, were passed before the election, the little domestic borough which he represented would be a defunct abuse ; but, whether it were defunct or no, he had made up his mind to stand for another place. He thought that he would be happier, stronger, and more free when he owed nothing to the Brents. He had heard very little of or from them since his marriage ; he persuaded himself to feel aggrieved by their silence. He seemed to himself to have had no rest, no time for rest in the last twelve months. Besides Parliamentary duties there had been house-hunting and furniture-hunting, occupations dear to the busy mind of his wife ; there had been dinners innumerable given in honor of the married Lady Gertrude, and balls and parties ; and then had followed country-house visits to several influential relations and a longer sojourn at Boucherett. John was sick of it all, and had assured himself again and again that all would be well when they were settled in their new house.

But somehow the time of needed repose did not seem to have come. Not colors chosen and harmonized by the last fashionable gentleman-decorator, not sofas stuffed with the most delicate down of the most expensive furnisher, could insure that rest which John knew yesterday. Something was wrong with him ; he became so easily irritable.

John Maidment sat struggling with a Blue-book

and with incipient irritability. He sat at the writing-table in the back drawing-room with a sheet of foolscap by the side of the Blue-book, and, when he lifted his eyes, they rested on and found no relief in a blank dirty-white wall to which a piece of bedraggled ivy hung by a rusty nail. The house was in an admirable neighborhood, and some sacrifice of space and air had been found necessary; so many people wished to live there; the houses seemed to have been fitted together like a puzzle. John felt himself cramped. He would have worked in his own den, but that tiny apartment was lower down in a sort of dry well, and at this winter season but little light crept down to its window, which was half-filled with unpleasant colored glass. So he sat in the back drawing-room trying to fix his mind on a young diplomatist's report on the condition of Small Proprietors near Naples, acutely conscious of his wife's movements, and in each interval of silence expecting her next sound.

Lady Gertrude had settled herself with the pronounced intention of working without a break and in perfect silence at a vast piece of artistic needlework; and yet but a short time had elapsed when John heard her rustling quickly across the room. Then he could hear her reseal herself with a great sigh, and almost immediately she was up again and bustling across the room. Instead of making calculations about olive-trees and acres, rough manners and full pockets, John could not help wondering what his wife was doing. Why should she move in such a hurry? And surely

her clothes made more noise than any other woman's. She sighed again ; she wriggled her broad shoulders over her work ; her chair squeaked and she answered it with a petulant exclamation. Presently she moved to another chair, which was nearer to her husband's back, and sighed. This sigh was so aggressive that John felt obliged to say, "What's the matter?"

He did not turn round, but his wife accepted the words as an opening.

"Nothing, dear," she said ; "I only wanted to know what night we should ask the Martyn Lawlers. You know who *she* is—the daughter of Aunt Maria. She has copied my gown."

She gave a little laugh which seemed to ask if he did not think that amazing. John, however, made no sign.

"I don't mind," she continued ; "why should I mind ? I don't care about dress ; I am perfectly indifferent to Society. But it is funny. It is the only one of my gowns which I got from Paris, and she has copied it before I have even had a chance of wearing it. Of course she pretends it isn't a bit like, but that's too absurd."

Here she gave another short laugh with more scorn in it.

"Would you very much mind telling me what night I shall ask the Lawlers?" she asked, after a pause.

"Whenever you like," said John, and he turned a page of his Blue-book.

She moved her shoulders, coughed, sighed twice,

and presently was impelled to ask, "What are you working at?"

"Politics."

"I really do think," she said plaintively, "that you might sometimes talk politics with me. Of course I am a woman and not worth consulting; but people did ask my advice before I married. Mr. Randall—and I suppose you will allow that *he* knew something about politics—used *often* to ask my opinion. Mr. Randall—"

"Hang Mr. Randall!" John cried, jumping up. "I wish to heaven you'd remember that one must sometimes think of something more important than your Lawlers and your Aunt Maria and—"

He was walking up and down the room, but she sat still. Her eyes were pink, and so was her nose; it was only pride which kept her tears from flowing. She was not looking handsome; she looked a little too large for that moderate house. John had already offended her deeply on one occasion by hinting that perhaps she ate too much. She was much aggrieved now.

"I dare say you talk politics with Susan Lulham," she said with point.

John gave an angry exclamation and dashed out of the room. He walked very fast in the street; he declared that his home was intolerable; he asked himself what he had done to deserve a nagging wife. He had married with such good intentions; he was so anxious to be a good husband; he knew that he was made to shine in domestic life; but he declared to

himself that Gertrude would not give him a chance. She would not let him alone ; she would fuss about ; she seemed to have no idea that she had married a man whose duty it was to think, who must have time and silence—other people's silence. She placed him in such a ridiculous position, when he was compelled to insist upon the importance of his thoughts. She was always holding up Randall to him, as if he must needs confess that he was a smaller man than Randall. However that might be, his own wife ought not to think him a smaller man. She bragged about him to outsiders in a way which was almost ridiculous, and yet she showed him that as a matter-of-course she held other men his betters. "I do wish," said John, as he hurried along the pavement, "that she had more moderation, more tact, more taste."

It was some consolation, to be sure, that when he and his wife disagreed it was always her fault ; but still it was very hard upon him. Of course she was fond of him, very fond of him, but even that had its inconvenient side—she had already shown symptoms of the most preposterous jealousy. When he was bothering himself, as so sensitive a man must (John confessed the necessity with a sigh), about some trifling point in this conduct, she was sure to begin asking questions with an aggravating transparent carelessness about the entire Brent family, and expressing her wonder that her husband's nearest friends showed so little desire to know her better. She made a grievance of the coolness of the Brent family, as she would have made an equally useful grievance out of any

eagerness to secure the advantages of a connection with Boucherett. While her husband sat behind his paper or bent over his writing-table, she would pass from the Brent family to the sole daughter of the House, and appeal to John for confirmation of her fancy portrait of Miss Letitia, as she called her. This was very unpleasant to John. Lately she had introduced more often the name of another lady, and with more direct aggravation had sniffed and laughed over her husband's liking for that middle-aged and sickly widow, Mrs. Lulham. She had begged men in John's presence to explain to her the great attraction of Mrs. Lulham. She was confident—and here she was right—that he would rather talk politics with Susan Lulham than with her.

John had said to himself again and again since his marriage that his wife had been spoiled. He was vastly indignant with the snobbishness and frivolity of clever men, who had listened with deference to the views of Lady Gertrude Bookham, because she belonged to an important family, or because she was a handsome woman. He knew that these men must have known that some of her opinions were absurd, and others mere echoes of those of the party leaders who frequented her father's house—that her political creed taken as a whole was a mass of inconsistencies.

And now the punishment, which should fall upon those flattering worldlings, fell on the lady's husband. Because he would not pretend to consult her on the affairs of the nation she was aggrieved, and he knew that she would be always aggrieved. John said to



himself that it must be so—that he would not pretend to think her political opinions worth discussing. It was comfort to him to determine that he would be honest; and it removed from his forebodings of the future the dismal nightmare of long sham discussions, from which he could derive no profit.

John walked and walked till his mind grew more easy, and he began to think of his wife with a kinder feeling. At last he almost smiled as he pictured her enjoying a good cry. She was sure to have had a good cry, to have felt better, to have rung for a cup of tea. The thought of a cup of tea struck the young man as pleasant, and he looked about him to see where he was. It was certain that Lady Gertrude had finished her consoling cup, but he had walked so far from home that, if he turned leftward a little toward the river, he would come to Mrs. Lulham's house. Mrs. Lulham had excellent tea, which was sent to her by a Russian friend, whose name she never mentioned; but if the friend was questionable, the tea was above criticism, and the thought of it carried John a little further from home to that small drawing-room, where he found most delicate tea and a flattery of a somewhat coarser flavor.

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## CHAPTER XX.

To make an impression was the breath of life to Mrs. Lulham. She had never been beautiful; she

had been young but for a moment ; she had never been strong nor well ; she had always been interesting. To be interesting was the one interest of her life. Her husband had been an episode ; she had had no child ; but there had always been some man or some woman whose thoughts were full of her. There had been more men than women. She grew tired of this or that one or they were tired of her, but there were always others who were attracted in turn ; and the frequent changes were saved from a too crude appearance by her frequent changes of abode. As the wife of a good-looking colorless Secretary of Legation, she had visited many climates and found them all disagree with her ; and since she had cremated her husband, she had wandered to please herself, a very Ulysses for travel and a Circe for wiles. She had listened to the theosophist in the East Indies and to the obeah-man in the West ; wherever she went she had kept about her a peculiar atmosphere compounded of mystery and the sick-room, which had drawn many people to her. Unusual people came to her—fashionable women grown weary of leaving cards ; politicians with plans for the future of Constantinople and of Jerusalem ; parsons in search of the lost tribes ; the thought-reader ; the healer by blue glass ; the healer by faith ; journalists with a good deal of leisure ; novelists who appealed to the cultured few ; the unacted dramatist and the unappreciated actor ; the soprano in search of an engagement ; a small army of reciters who were always ready to leap up and begin ; and, when she was in England, a little string of for-

eigners with hungry faces and cigarettes. She adored cigarettes and smoked incessantly by the advice of her doctor. She attracted men and women, but more men than women ; she was a mistress of the art of flattery, measuring her doses like a skillful salad-maker and prodigal with the oil.

Mrs. Lulham lay on the sofa in her small drawing-room, with the last pamphlet on Buddha and the last realistic novel from Paris. The tea-table was before her and the tea had just been made. To some, who had been disappointed in her, she might have suggested a small spider, rather bloated, motionless in the center of her web ; but to those immediately interested there was something strangely significant in the direct grave gaze of the round brown eyes, which stared at nothing visible. A delicate faint smoke floated around her head. She seemed as one who awaited a summons. The two young men who were present were of the immediately interested ; they respected her impressive stillness ; they conversed together in whispers. And they too were interesting. The taller of the two, Conrad Typekins, was a socialist and a designer of mantel-pieces. He was tall and slim, with thin brightly-colored cheeks. His features were small and neat, and there was pert independence about his mouth ; his hair was longer than the fashionable length ; his eyes were calm and defensive. He was obliged to watch his own manner in the presence of those who might forget that they received a favor in being allowed to buy his little shelves and brackets. He calmly awaited the time when no private citizen

would be able to have a mantel-piece of his own, but in the mean time his little heart was glad in secret that in his brief day there were still luxurious homes, where he might be asked to dine with his back to his own design, and be easy in bearing and loftily tolerant of surprised millionaires. The friend who whispered to Conrad so eagerly was a soft meek-looking youth, with flaxen down upon his chin and a lisping speech, which he had adopted as more pleasing than his native cockney. Basil Gustard was a poet, precious and passionate. His poems were extremely erotic; he seemed to have acquired a faint permanent blush from the perusal of them. Lisping and whispering, Mr. Gustard spoke eagerly to Mr. Typekins, and both young men glanced ever and anon at their hostess, who sat like a priestess with the faint smoke about her, rapt, contemplative, waiting.

If the priestess was waiting for something, it seemed that on this occasion at least it was for something tangible, for the set face relaxed into a smile as the little parlor-maid brought in the cake, which she had fetched from the shop at the corner. But the lady's face was solemn again when a minute later John Maidment entered.

"I knew that you would come," she said. She had not been so sure of the cake, for the confectioner had been rather impertinent of late. "I always feel your coming," she said to John, as she held his hand.

John was pleased. The welcome was soothing; the tea was not yet bitter; he was the most important male. The other young men admired Mr. Maid-

ment ; they admired him as artists ; they knew that he had had a success with the press and with the public. They would not have confessed how they would have enjoyed a success with the public and the press—how they would have enjoyed despising it. To Typekins, moreover, Boucherett had long seemed a splendid setting for one of his mantel-pieces ; he had pictured himself at Boucherett with his masterpiece among masterpieces, artist and work alike polished and alike admired, educating the taste of the barbarian, tolerant of surrounding dukes. As for Basil Gustard, for whom history began and ended with Mary Queen of Scots, he spoke of John behind his back with rapture, and with his own special talent for the inappropriate had named him “Chastelard.” Conrad with open fearless looks, Basil with furtive glances, admired John Maidment, as he sipped the delicious Caravan tea ; and then they listened with joy while he talked, and the little sphinx on the sofa sat smiling, musing, ineffable. All the talk seemed to mean a vast deal more than it could mean ; every word was more interesting than it had ever been before. Time flew so fast that John broke short off in his speech, astonished by the clock, which even in that atmosphere was keeping the commonplace time of prosaic accurate Greenwich. He perceived with amazement that he must hurry home if he would not keep Lady Gertrude waiting for dinner.

John had been soothed and comforted. As he walked toward home, he grew warm and hopeful. He thought of his wife awaiting him, and it seemed

easy to be tolerant of her small weaknesses and grateful for her deep affection. He saw her with his mind's eye glowing and dressed with modest richness for their little dinner of two ; he enjoyed by anticipation the comfortable dining-room with the glowing fire, and enjoyed too the thought that he might use coal freely without considering the cost. It was no small matter to have a wife, who was naturally sumptuous and could afford to be sumptuous ; he determined to be very kind and very considerate. He impulsively hailed a hansom lest he should keep her waiting for dinner.

John let himself into his house, and was struck in a moment with a sense of desolation. There was no light in the dining-room, into which he advanced cautiously that he might ring the bell. His servant appeared with an air of polite surprise. Her ladyship had gone to a meeting for the friendless window-cleaners ; she had left no message.

Was any one ever so uncomfortably charitable ? If his man had not been so extremely gentlemanlike, John would have expressed aloud his contempt for the distressed window-cleaners. He was sure that his wife would be a bore at the meeting, would ask unnecessary questions with the solemn over-businesslike air of a woman transacting business, and would be aggrieved at not receiving enough attention. John was annoyed.

“ I suppose I can have some dinner ? ” he said.

“ There were no orders, sir. I'll ask the cook. ”

In a minute the admirable domestic returned.

"Mrs. Cantle says, sir, that her ladyship supposed that of course you knew it was her ladyship's night for the distressed window-cleaners ; and her ladyship didn't leave no orders for any dinner, supposing that you would dine at the club."

John had not taken off his hat ; he hurried out, found another hansom, and went with much annoyance to dine at his club.

John was lingering over his solitary dinner when he saw Mr. Fisher coming toward him. Mr. Fisher was very polite to John. He was editor of a new and original weekly review, and he kept an eye and a genial smile on rising talent. This broad smile and an air of candid admiration did wonders for Mr. Fisher. He was not a great man, but he had a keen eye for those who might be great ; he had become prominent by detecting the promise of prominence in others. He seemed to say, "I am a simple fellow, and, when I see an admirable piece of work, I blurt out my admiration of its author. I am sure we should suit each other. You must do something for my paper some day." Now he came and sat by John's side and encouraged him to talk, and when he saw his mouth opening, he looked at him with a broad smile of expectation. John began to feel better.

"You are going to do nothing this evening," said Mr. Fisher with confidence ; "come with me to Mrs. Lulham's."

It was a coincidence ; John was tempted. It had been very pleasant in the afternoon ; why should he not go back ? He remembered that his wife did not

like Mrs. Lulham ; she would not be pleased at his visiting that lady twice in one day. She had provided nothing for him ; she had cut him adrift for the evening ; why should he not go where he could find amusement—harmless amusement ?

While these thoughts were flying, he rather lamely observed that he was not dressed.

“She cares for none of those things,” said Mr. Fisher ; “she is at home in the Continental fashion, in the evening, to all sorts of coats.” He laughed aloud. “Come,” he said, “and sit at her feet with me !” He had the air of a genial uncle offering a treat. He passed his arm through John’s as if he were hooking a shy contributor, and the young man allowed himself to be led away.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

It is not always wise to try to repeat an agreeable experience. Not three hours had passed, but in three hours how many changes may not an imaginative female in delicate health undergo ? It was a different Mrs. Lulham who received John Maidment after his short absence. She was not surprised (it is not the way of sphinxes) ; it was her mission to surprise. But she did not show enough pleasure at seeing him again, and the young man was chilled ; there was a slight restlessness in her, and a tendency to paradox. Per-



haps she was tired of Mr. Fisher, who had been pressing her hand for twelve months past, and assuring her in a low tone that she must write something for him. She had been much tempted by this prospect ; she was dying to publish a series of papers on all sorts of things with a peculiar signature. She was beginning to doubt if this frank admiring editor would ever come from general protestations to a particular engagement—to a date for commencement and an offer of money. Perhaps she was tired of Mr. Fisher ; perhaps she thought that Mr. Maidment, who really interested her, would grow tired of her too soon if he came too often. She was restless, and twice as mysterious as ever.

John was not amused, and began to wish that he had not made this second visit. He was doing a thing which his wife would dislike very much, if she knew about it, and the thing was not amusing. He was standing near one of the two narrow windows, when a brougham was pulled up short a few doors off and he saw a man get out. At the same moment he felt the little brown hand of his hostess clutch his arm.

“Quick !” she cried, “hide yourself ; I implore you ; if you love me !”

Even while she cried out she had seized with her other hand the coat-sleeve of Mr. Fisher, and the two men yielding gracefully to excessive weakness allowed themselves to be thrust into the little back drawing-room. With nervous haste the impulsive lady pulled the folding-doors together, and left her guests in darkness. John was not at all amused.

"Preposterous antics!" he muttered between his teeth, and he kicked away a stool, over which he had stumbled; he felt as if he were treated like a fool. Mr. Fisher was smiling more widely than ever; he meant to convey that he was a good fellow, a man of the world who was not to be put out by trifles, and generally that he found the world satisfactory; he meant to express a great deal by that smile, but he forgot that he was smiling in the dark. So true it is that even the wisest of men are to some extent creatures of habit. There was a step on the stairs, the noise of a door, and then the door which opened from the place of captivity on to the landing was cautiously opened, and Mrs. Lulham's own maid appeared. This maid spoke little of any known language; she was suspected of being something Slavonic. Basil Gustard had darkly hinted that it was a man disguised on account of political eccentricities. It seemed to have a faint odor of dynamite. Whatever it was, it was more mysterious than its mistress. The swarthy fat face, illumined by a flickering flat candle, was full of expression, and the dirty beckoning finger was most authoritative. John obeyed with a contemptuous "pish," and Mr. Fisher brought his smile out into the faint light of the staircase.

In a house where the postman leaves a letter from the Himalayas, and a prophet takes by mistake a conspirator's umbrella, it is only natural that the occasional dust-pan should be left on the stairs. John, made careless by annoyance, stepped in the dust-pan, stumbled, hit the being who was their guide in the

broad back and sent the candlestick flying. A parrot shrieked from under the stairs at the new darkness ; an object leaped from under John's feet, possibly the cat, perhaps a familiar spirit. John gave a ridiculous start, caught at the banister and twisted his wrist, and uttered a sharp exclamation as he arrived with a run in the narrow hall. The possible Bulgar now re-lighted the candle, and as its feeble ray fell on the umbrella-stand, Mr. Fisher began to stare at it with a face full of meaning.

When they were in the street, Mr. Fisher pressed John's arm affectionately. "Did you see the umbrella?" he asked with a smile full of wide knowledge ; "it was Simpson's ; I know its onyx top."

"I dare say," said John crossly.

"I know it," said Mr. Fisher ; "it is the smartest umbrella in London."

"Simpson is there, if that is what you want to get at. I saw him."

"You saw him !" cried Mr. Fisher standing still to express his great surprise. "How ? where ? how wonderful !" He stared with admiration illuminating his face, which was further lighted by a street lamp.

John was better pleased. "I saw him from the window," he said.

"Nothing escapes you," said his friend loudly, "nothing"; and he continued to look at Mr. Maidment as if he were learning an invaluable lesson.

"Why under heaven," cried John, growing rapidly hot again, "are we to be hustled out of the way of

Mr. Simpson? Has she such an admiration for Mr. Simpson?"

"He is a Cabinet Minister."

"He is a time-serving rascal."

"Have you never observed?" said Mr. Fisher, ignoring this dangerous calling of names, "have you never observed—of course you have—that even the cleverest women attach immense importance to a Cabinet Minister? It's like the servant-girls—it's the uniform—when they have once seen the gold stripe down the trousers—you'll find it so yourself. It won't be long before you find the power of the gold stripe down the trousers."

John could not help a reluctant smile; it was pleasant to hear such a prophecy from a man who certainly had a wide acquaintance with successful men. John had been standing still since Mr. Fisher first arrested his steps, and they had got no further from the house than the corner of the next street, when they came face to face with a man whom they both recognized in the moment of passing. Indeed he was a remarkable person. His jet black hair, thin pale cheeks and finely-cut features made him romantic as the first independent drawing of a school-girl, and it was a well-known fact that, though an Irish patriot, he had refused a large gift of money collected for his comfort from the poorest peasantry in the world. This enthusiast paid no attention to the people whom he met in the street; he strode forward muttering to himself, and John and Mr. Fisher saw him stop at Mrs. Lulham's door, and without one look behind,

enter that suspicious abode. John was furious. To have been hustled out of a house that a Cabinet Minister might have a secret interview with a man whom he and his colleagues loftily denounced from their majestic bench ! And what made it most bitter was, that this Minister was of all Ministers the one who exasperated him most. Mr. Simpson displayed in his face a very unusual combination of self-sufficiency and resolution. He had the nose of a pampered toy-terrier and the chin of a bull-dog. He was like a weasel for sharpness and tenacity, agile in movement and untiring in pursuit, following his object as a weasel follows a rabbit in a warren, through any number of dark devious ways. Mr. Simpson had offended John Maidment by his mere appearance, and, though he had not come into collision with him, the offense had deepened. Of all the prominent politicians this was the one with whom John foresaw that he would have the bitterest struggles. He was confident that he would be stronger in argument and immeasurably superior in eloquence (for he held the speaking of Mr. Simpson to be bald and common as the speaking of a dexterous vestryman) ; but he had a presentiment that this peak-nosed politician would be slow to know that he was beaten, would be eternally confident, would shift his ground and say that he had not, and would appeal powerfully to the average House of Commons people by personal attacks and commonplace jests. The horn of the rhinoceros is strong though not elegant, and his hide would make a candidate eligible for any constituency.

John could keep silence no longer ; he began to pour forth his indignation. He recalled with ardor how, at a recent meeting, this very Simpson had repudiated with excessive mockery the idea that Her Majesty's Government would hold any intercourse, other than open debate in Parliament, with the Irish party ; and now here he was closeted in a little bureau of intrigue with the most violent and least loyal of contemporary Irishmen. John was warm and eloquent, walking and talking as if one were not more difficult than the other, and the appreciative Fisher heard him with delight. The young member rose from this incident of the night to the general question of political morality ; and he spoke brilliantly, as he had spoken before upon this subject, on the awful contrast between public profession and private conduct, on the hypocrisy and cynicism and the disgust which they could not but excite in the young, the generous, and the true.

When he had finished, Mr. Fisher seized his hand and held it hard. "Why don't you do an article for me ?" he said with zeal.

John gave a little laugh, as if he would put the suggestion aside. "It would not do for me to appear in such a thing," he said.

"But you need not appear. You could assume a name—a *nom de plume*—it's done every day. There is nobody I would sooner ask. It is a good work, a great public duty to show up Simpson."

"It is not Simpson only, he is nothing ; it is a wide and a spreading evil."

"Precisely," cried Fisher with expanding admiration; "precisely! But Simpson must be used as a type, and attacked as a type. It would be immense. No man living could do it so well as you."

It was impossible not to smile, impossible not to be gratified by so bold a statement from this amateur of able men. John smiled, but he shook his head.

"I shall expect it," said Mr. Fisher. "You ought to do it; it is the obvious thing for you to do; it would be worthy of you. Mind! I shall expect it."

He pressed the young orator's hand in both of his, hailed a passing hansom, and gave the address of an archbishop.

"No, no," said John as he turned away, but he was still smiling. He thought that it was true indeed that he could do it better than most men—if only it were right that he should do it at all—but he would think no more of it, it would not do. He stepped out briskly homeward.

John Maidment's mind was one of those active machines which, when a tempting subject is brought before them, begin to work of themselves, and to turn out appropriate phrases. John had said to himself that he would think no more of the proposed philippic against Simpson, and yet, as his feet trod the pavement, so easily and rhythmically did sentences come tripping to his tongue. If he cared to do such a job, it would be effective to write this and that and the other. He smiled as pertinent words came to him in quick succession, and now and then an epigram; he laughed aloud at the thought that here at least was

something which would make even the rhinoceros-hided Simpson feel.

When John awoke the next morning, he began at once to recall the words and sentences which had seemed so effective, and to consider if they still impressed him favorably. The subject had taken hold of him, and would not let him go, though he laughed and told himself that he played with it. He looked at it as good mental exercise, which would have no tangible result ; it was amusing to plan this crushing attack which would never be made. After breakfast he shut himself into his little dim den and began to write quickly. It seemed a pity not to jot down the most effective of these sentences, which had seemed to spring up of themselves. He thought that he could dismiss them from his mind when he had put them in his drawer ; they really were too good to be lost ; they really did seem to him amazingly pungent and scathing. He would write them out and think no more of them. Two hours later John was writing rapidly. His pen seemed to fly, and on the floor beside him was a growing heap of foolscap pages. He had not a moment for thinking what he should do with his morning's work ; the sentences were formed more quickly than he could write them, and he was swept along with great excitement, feeling that he was doing a thing superlatively well.

Meanwhile Lady Gertrude had had a most cheerful interview with her cook, and was bustling about up-stairs with abundant appreciation of the pleasures of life. She had quickly repented of her conduct of



the day before, and had spent a most uncomfortable evening, irritated by the lady friends of the friendless window-cleaners, and by visions of her poor husband in a dismal home and with no dinner ordered. She had expected sharp words when she came home and expected them again in the morning ; but her husband had been kind. She was very happy, and was convinced that she had a husband of a generous and noble nature.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

It was lucky for Lady Gertrude Maidment that she had a hearty temperament and a happy power of rebounding. She was very much in love with her husband, and at moments when all things smiled she felt the same abundant belief in him. But her unquestioning faith had become a mood of moments ; she was too often fretful about him, uneasy about what he would do or say next. She had complained of him often to her placid mother, and been angry with her for not defending him warmly ; she had complained even to her intimate friends, though from no one of them would she accept the slightest criticism of his conduct. She was disappointed.

It was no new thing for Lady Gertrude to be disappointed. She had enjoyed a thousand disappointments ; but this was the most bitter of all, and she got the least enjoyment out of it. She had been so

gloriously confident, when she married John Maidment, that the disappointments of life were at an end. Many things had refused to adapt themselves to her wishes when she was a girl, and she had affirmed a thousand times that nothing ever went right. But marriage was to change all that. She was going to marry a perfect husband, whom she adored. She displayed him with the more ample pride, because some people might dare to suppose that she was making a poor marriage ; she was half worshiper, half great discoverer. She thought that she had discovered this brilliant being outside her world ; she felt herself a female Columbus. She had placed her husband on a pedestal, and prepared to burn incense before him in the presence of all individuals of the Boucherett set. She had intended without one moment's doubt to have done with disappointments for life. But her good intentions had gone the old way. As in former days the important man would refuse the invitation to dinner ; as the young person of talent would show the basest ingratitude ; as the venerable-seeming pauper in the village would be overheard using the least agreeable language : so in these early days of Lady Gertrude's married life did the husband whom she had chosen refuse to be in all respects the ideal husband whom she had intended to exalt.

She was aggrieved more and more often. She had meant to be his true helper, and he would have none of her help in his life's work. He answered shortly or in a bored tone ; or he went away. He went away too often. This was not the life-union of which she

had dreamed. Was she to be no more than the occasional companion of his lighter hours—she who had always been held so clever—she who had been so often consulted by wise men? John seemed to take it as a matter of course that she should have no share in his serious work; this made her jump with aggravation. But there was something below this, an irritating cause which she would not drag to the light and look at, and this was the growing consciousness that her husband's love for her was much less than hers for him.

It must not be supposed that Lady Gertrude blamed her lord and did not blame herself. She was accustomed to blame herself. She had a high ideal of wifely duty. She had always had high ideals, but she had acquired long ago a comforting belief that one of course fell short of high ideals. "Of course one must fall short," she said to herself. So she blamed herself for finding fault with her husband, for her impatience and her occasional fretfulness; but she did not blame herself much. It was very hard that her married life would not run as she had meant it to run; it was part of the general aggravation of things; she was sure that other women were not so tormented.

It was after luncheon, and Lady Gertrude had ascended to her drawing-room in a very virtuous state of mind. She bustled about, getting rid of some superfluous vitality and making yet another rearrangement of the furniture, and then she seated herself on the music-stool, which seemed a little over-burdened

with her and her conscience, and began to play and to sing not very inaccurately with her big contralto voice. This conscientious performance was interrupted by the announcement and entry, as of the sun-god beaming, of Mr. Fisher. The sight of Mr. Fisher reminded the lady of something which she had taken to herself as a grievance, and she bounced off the music-stool. She was eager to welcome and to scold her guest.

"Oh, Mr. Fisher," she cried, "I have a most dreadful bone to pick with you!"

"Any bone," said Mr. Fisher with ready gallantry, "which I may share with Lady Gertrude Maidment will be a treat to me. Better a bone with Lady Gertrude than a stalled ox and other people therewith."

He laid his hat on his heart before he deposited it on the table, and smiled. He had expressed much admiration in his time for this opulent lady, whom he had admired largely in her splendid home of former days. He had taken with him to Boucherett the very best butter, and had been introduced in return (to carry on the same agricultural metaphor) to some of the finest cheeses; he had tasted with gusto the rich compliments with which he had regaled the daughter of the House; and he had been asked to meet and to express his approval of many noble personages. Boucherett had been often in the smiling mouth of Mr. Fisher, and he now gazed at its fairest flower with an air of frank expectation of something unusually good.

Lady Gertrude was fussing among the reviews and

pamphlets on the table; and she presently arose in triumph with the new number of her visitor's popular periodical.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, and Mr. Fisher pretended to hide his face. "It's a most disgraceful article," she continued less playfully. "I can't imagine how you can bring yourself to put such a thing in your magazine."

"Dear, dear, dear! What article in my poor weekly has had the misfortune to offend Lady Gertrude Maidment?"

She held the book open before him and said, "You know perfectly well what I mean. What could I mean except this horrid attack on Mr. Simpson?"

Mr. Fisher burst out laughing as if she had been irresistibly humorous: he really thought that she had made a joke.

"I am not laughing at all," said the lady emphatically; "it is a horrid article, horrid and personal, and in the very worst taste. Of course I do not agree with anything which Mr. Simpson says, but that's *no* reason why I should like to see him attacked in this disgraceful way."

By this time the editor was regarding her with a very blank look. He was almost dismayed.

"Who is this 'Martin Johnson,'" asked the lady with her rosy finger on the page, "who puts his name to such stuff?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Fisher, with his slyest and his most deprecating air, "ah!" and he shook his head.

He was good-natured and he was really very sorry.

He saw that it would be a monstrous pity if a trifle were to disturb so excellent and harmonious arrangement as this Maidment marriage. He delighted in harmonious arrangements ; he had been warming himself at this successful alliance of unusual ability with wealth and race and beauty. Carefully and tenderly but soon with growing warmth he began to defend the unlucky article. He quoted the opinion of Lord This and Mr. That, and he ended by saying that the paper had had an immense success and that everybody was talking about it.

But Lady Gertrude would not be converted.

"I particularly dislike that sort of thing," she said. "I can't understand why people are allowed to attack a man's private life and habits just because he happens to be in a public position. It's the *very* thing which people were always abusing in Americans—only of course nowadays nobody abuses Americans for anything ; one is nothing unless one is American."

This seemed as if it would introduce another grievance—a very little one—of Lady Gertrude's, but Mr. Fisher thought it wiser not to prolong the interview. "Is Mr. Maidment at home ?" he asked, "and can I see him ?"

"Oh yes," she said, and rang the bell and told the servant to let Mr. Maidment know that Mr. Fisher was there.

After a minute the servant returned and said that Mr. Maidment had gone out.

"Gone out !" cried Lady Gertrude sharply, and

almost before the door was shut she said in an ag-grieved tone to her visitor, "I really do think John might have let me know that he was going out."

Mr. Fisher could do nothing but smile and look deprecating; he felt that there were dangerous under-currents in this placid-seeming marriage; it was a great pity. "Dear lady," he said after a little consideration, "dear lady, you must not be too hard on us. Your standard is too high for mere men—and pray don't be too hard on my poor contributor. I do assure you that he is such a good fellow, so high-toned, such a gentleman."

The lady gave no answer but a contemptuous jerk and snort. "It's too provoking of John," she said; "it's always the way. Of course you wanted to see him about something important?"

"Oh no, no," said Mr. Fisher, "it doesn't matter—doesn't matter in the least. I've no doubt I shall find him."

"Where?"

"At Mrs. Lulham's." It was not tactful, and Mr. Fisher knew it as soon as the words were out of his mouth; he felt that it was an unlucky day with him. "I rather think he is going there expecting to see me about something," he added lamely. "Good-by, dear lady; I must fly." He pressed her hand, smiled the greatest possible encouragement, and hurried away. He raised his eyebrows as he ran down-stairs, and whistled when he found himself safe in the street.

Lady Gertrude was hurt. Her husband had slipped

out and gone to Susan Lulham's. She had no doubt about that, and no doubt that he preferred the society of "that intriguing ridiculous little wretch" to her own. She could not sit down and work, or play on the piano. She could think of no comfort but in making herself uncomfortable; she looked round for some annoying duty. She decided to put her husband's den in order, foreseeing that in doing something for him when he was treating her so badly she would find a dismal satisfaction. He might go to his "rubbishy widows," but she would still do her duty as a wife. She hurried down the stairs and shut herself into John's little room.

A little later John Maidment, who had been for an innocent stroll in the neighboring park, let himself into his house and opened the door of his study. He stood still on the threshold, for there was his wife. Lady Gertrude had been sitting before his writing-table, but she bounced up at his entrance, red and rustling and angry. "No! don't come near me!" she cried out; "don't come near me!"

"What's the matter?" asked John.

"You can ask what's the matter?" She pushed with the point of her shoe a loose sheet of paper which was lying on the floor, and John stooping picked up a bit of the rough draft of his ill-omened article. "You wrote that disgraceful thing," she said; "you can't deny it."

"I am not going to deny it."

"And you put a false name to it—oh! the disgrace! the disgrace!"



"What ridiculous nonsense ! Did you never even hear of a *nom de plume* ?"

"Nom de fiddlestick ! It's most base and cowardly, and—"

"Stop ! I can't expect you to understand—"

"Oh !" she cried, stamping her foot.

"Will you be reasonable ?"

"No."

"Then I will go away till you recover your temper."

"Yes, that's right—go away—go back to Mrs. Lulham—that's where you learn such tricks. Go back to your mountebank !"

John laughed, but the laugh was not pleasant. He really was amazed at her violence. He remembered that he had had some doubts about writing the article, but they had been such doubts as he was sure no other man in practical life would have admitted for a moment, and even he had dismissed them easily. And now he, the conscientious man, was attacked as if he had robbed a bank, and by his own wife ! He was disgusted. He looked at Gertrude, to whom grief was not becoming ; her nose was red as well as her eyes ; in his disgust he declared to himself that she looked like a coarse and common virago.

"You talk egregious nonsense," he said ; "you know nothing about it."

"I know that you never cared for me—I know that—I know that you must have married me for my—"

Whether she said the obnoxious word is uncertain. John had turned white, and, as she thrust herself be-

tween him and the door as if she would compel him to hear her, he pushed her not too gently on one side and went out. He heard her angry cry as he pulled the door to behind him, and snatching his hat in the hall he made haste to get away from his home. John was angry with Fate, with his wife, a little angry with himself. He admitted with some annoyance that, since his wife was wholly and ridiculously in the wrong, he ought to have been more tolerant of her absurdity. He walked about till he grew calm, and he made up his mind to punish Gertrude a little for her nonsense and then to forgive her loftily. The article was remarkably clever ; it had some capital phrases ; he was pleased with the little excitement which it had made. But he knew very well that with the next week's crop this telling paper would begin to fade, and that with the next month's abundant store it would be dead ; and he smiled as he thought that long before that an impulsive woman's anger would be in ashes, and she be weeping for her wicked speeches. She deserved a little punishment ; and so he determined to dine at his club without telling her of his intention, and to go home and forgive her before midnight. If by chance a sun should appear in London on the next morning it should not rise upon his wrath, however righteous. Thus did John Maidment venture to prophesy about a woman ; but, clever young man though he was, he was not on this occasion exactly right.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

JOHN dined at his club and read the papers, daily and weekly, until he thought that it was time to go home and dry his wife's repentant tears. He let himself into his hall, and there on the table he saw a little pile of letters and on the top of them a note without a stamp. With a shock of surprise, unpleasant as a sudden pail of water, he recognized the large handwriting of his wife. He tore the note open and read it by the light in the passage. The first words were enough to show that here was no mood of repentance.

"After having struck me," she wrote—an oath leaped from John's lips. Was not this the most exasperating thing which had ever happened to man? That he, John Maidment, should be accused of striking a woman! What was the use of keeping one's self on a higher level than other men, if such a thing as this could happen to one? He marched into his den, lighted two candles, and spread the exasperating misssive flat on the outside of his blotting-book. He would read it calmly and quietly and then go upstairs and speak very gravely indeed to his wife. In another moment he was aware that he might go upstairs, but would find no wife to profit by his words of wisdom.

"After having struck me," she had written, "you can hardly be surprised that I have gone to my own people. I make no complaint. I make no concealment. I have simply gone to my own people at Bou-

cherett." He dashed into the hall and picked up the empty envelope. As he expected, he had not broken any seal; the note had been stuck and very lightly; it was likely enough that every servant in the house had read it. How like her! She had no reticence—no refinement—no care that this abominable accusation should not be discussed in the servants' hall. His mind was working at double speed with the most painful and perplexing consequences. By this time he thought that his wife with her box and her burden of grievances was at Boucherett, a martyr, with all her sorrows displayed, or with that elaborated appearance of concealment which displays the most. He could see her pink-eyed, inconsolable, with the air of having done with life, and with a little enjoyment in amazing her stolid mother. To-morrow it would be talked about in the drawing-room, the housekeeper's room, the servants' hall, the harness-room, the village pot-house, and the new coffee tavern. He declared to himself with exceeding bitterness that for him it might be no less than ruin. He cursed his luck. What cruelty of Fortune that his career should be spoiled at its outset by his pushing past a woman with a little too much impatience—and such a career! He had never felt so certain of the future, which would have been his but for this accident. He felt as if the pearl of all the world had been his and had slipped from his wet fingers to the dark unmeasured sea. He had made a capital start; he was master of a fountain of eloquence, which bubbled up as free and clear as if it were one with the fountain of youth it-

self; he had industry, ability, charm. He had had character: character had been that which distinguished him from other politicians, of whom many had industry, all some measure of ability, a few some personal charm. He had known so well that his character was his special recommendation—the lamp which he must keep bright if he would dazzle the eyes of men. He had impressed everybody from his early boyhood by his earnestness; it was this which had given more than half its effect to his eloquence. He had always known this, but now it seemed all doubly sure as he trembled lest he should lose it all. A domestic scandal, a separation from his wife at the very outset of their married life—it was enough to blast the most promising career of the day. Fight as he might, and speak as nobly as he could, the shadow would not depart from his life. He declared to himself that this trumpety misunderstanding might be for him no less than ruin.

As he stood pale and silent by his writing-table, he began mechanically to open the letters which he had picked up from the hall table with this fatal note. His mind was busy with this wretched business, while he glanced over a few bills, circulars, and notes, of no importance, and dropped them from his limp fingers. The last of the pile was from America, and recognizing Paul's handwriting, he felt, even in the midst of his annoying thoughts, a faint curiosity. He tore open the letter, and saw that Paul had written from his ranch in Montana.

"I have late news of your father," John read,

"from a trustworthy man. He has had what may turn out a real stroke of luck, but he is very far from well. As soon as my mate comes back here, I shall start for Leadville, but he won't be back for a month and I can't leave the beasts before. Then I shall be free to stay in Colorado till I have put the affair straight for your father ; but I want you, if you can, to come out and see to him. From what I hear he ought to be taken right away out of the place ; he is doing no good there. Come, if you can, and take him away to England and take care of him, while I see to this mining affair of his. If you can't come, send a traveling servant who has been off the beaten track and has his wits about him and is not too old. But come yourself if you can. If you start at once on receipt of this, I can meet you at Pueblo, and we can go up together. Wire if you come or send substitute. Your way is by New York, Chicago, O. B. and Q. and Atchison and Topeka Railways, all plain sailing, and I think you ought to come if you can."

This was Paul's letter, and as John read it, his mind began to work with new possibilities. Was this the way of escape from his troubles ? If the letter had come yesterday, he knew that he would have been searching for a courier with both youth and experience ; but now it might be well that he himself should go. The mere idea roused him from his dull depression to his proper vitality, his nervous energy. Should he go ? Should he start at once ? He concentrated all his thinking powers on this question. He saw at a glance that it was an immense temptation, for it

would free him from the immediate and most annoying necessity of trying to bring his wife back. He abhorred the idea of going to Boucherett in the morning, of interviews, of correspondence, of having to defend his conduct, which needed no defense. He was tempted to start for Leadville instead of Boucherett; but since he realized the strength of the temptation, he was determined not to yield to it until he was sure that it would be the best possible means of strengthening his position in the future. He pressed his head between his hands and sat thinking. Would it not be well for him to start at once for the Rocky Mountains? If he went he could leave behind him a clear statement of the reason of his going—a reason which gave a full and admirable explanation of his temporary separation from his wife. He would take care that it should be stated, both publicly and privately, that urgent private affairs had summoned him to America. He would leave a better and more circumstantial story, which was moreover true, with people who were sure not to keep it to themselves. It should be freely mentioned that he had been called to his father, and had set out with striking haste to the heart of the Rocky Mountains. If there were also fickle rumors of possible wealth and possible peril, they would add to the picturesqueness of the story, and make it float more easily and in a wider circle. His quick mind began to foresee interested faces, and to compose newspaper paragraphs.

On the other hand, John knew that there would be whispers, idle or malignant or both. It was certain

that tongues would wag with rumors of a quarrel between himself and his wife. But it was already too late to prevent this. Even if he brought her home to-morrow, there would be some nods full of meaning, some babbling over teacups ; and it was by no means certain that he would succeed in bringing her home to-morrow. Gossip there must be, and, if he did not go away, the tale of their quarrel would have no tale to contradict it. If he did go, the whisper of one would be met by the loud denial of another, who knew for a fact that John Maidment had been called to America on urgent private affairs (probably involving a great increase of wealth), and that Lady Gertrude had gone, as was natural, to her own people, and would stay with them till he returned.

He wondered if he dared to trust his wife to be decently reticent. If she spent the next few weeks with her people, he knew that she would wear too often an injured air, and would allow herself too often a plaintive remark or a sigh full of meaning. But he thought that she would not go beyond this in her intercourse with the outer world, and that she would accept his story and let it pass as a full explanation of her separation from him. He counted on the reaction after this bold step which she had taken ; he thought that she would be rather frightened, and that, when she learned that he was going away for an indefinite time to face difficulties, perhaps dangers, she would be rather softened too. Besides, he would leave influences to work upon her. When he had sat thinking for some time, he got up with the determi-



nation of going to Liverpool in the morning, and if possible of sailing on the next day.

John rang his bell softly, uncertain if his servant were still awake. He was anxious about this brief interview, and he stood so that he could see the man's face lighted by his two candles. After a few minutes the man appeared in the doorway, and John told him that he had been called to America and that Lady Gertrude would remain at Boucherett till his return in a few weeks. He gave him a few commonplace directions, told him that he must pack in the morning, and sent him to bed. Looking closely at the man's face, he was sure that he received his story with perfect faith, and that he at least had not read Lady Gertrude's note. This seemed a good omen, and his spirits rose. He seated himself at his table and began to write. His first letter was to Mr. Fisher, who for his sake would see that some paragraphs were inserted in certain papers with which this prosperous editor had considerable influence. He was very frank in tone with Mr. Fisher. He told him that his father's affairs were taking him to Colorado, and that, as a public man, he wished the public to have a chance of knowing why he went and whither he was going. At the end he mentioned that his wife had gone to Boucherett and would probably stay there till he returned, and he added a playful postscript.

To Basil Gustard, who would be immensely flattered by the attention, John wrote a more picturesque account of the summons which he had received, and of the adventurous journey which he was about to

make ; and he playfully advised him to refer to it in the society paper to which he was a frequent contributor. Then John dashed off the same thing in a chivalrous note to Mrs. Lulham, who sat at the center of so great a web of rumors ; and finally, he inclosed a paragraph, carefully prepared by himself, to the editor of a widely-circulated daily paper, who had shown a disposition to be friendly. He begged this useful acquaintance to insert his paragraph at the first opportunity, as he was called away so suddenly that he had not time to inform his friends, nor any person who might expect to consult with him on any public matter.

When these letters had been written with as much ease as propriety, John turned his attention to three of a different character. With ready pen he dashed off a note to Colonel Brent ; and he was surprised, as he wrote, to find how pleased he was with the thought that the Colonel would approve of his prompt start ; that Paul would be glad of his coming so quickly in answer to his appeal ; that all the Brents would like him better for this decision. His next task gave him more trouble. He wrote to Mr. Randall, and told him plainly that he and his wife had had a difference of opinion ; that she had misunderstood him, and had started for a visit to Boucherett before he had had a chance of convincing her that she had misunderstood him. He told him that news of the utmost importance about his father had come, as soon as his wife had gone ; and that he was obliged to start for America at once, without even seeing Lady

Gertrude. In these perplexing circumstances he appealed to Mr. Randall to use his great influence with the family at Boucherett, for their sake even more than for his own, to let no rumor of any disagreement get abroad before his return, which would be very soon. He pointed out that until his return the separation needed no explanation ; and he ended by assuring Mr. Randall that the dispute was about a trifle, and that he trusted to his tact and ability, and friendship for his wife's family, as he would trust no qualities of any other man. He was very careful in writing this letter, and, when it was finished, he was content with it. Another, a more impetuous version, he wrote to Lady Whimley.

"I hope," he wrote at the end of it, "that Gertrude will some day learn that, whatever my faults may be, I am incapable of rudeness to a woman. I will not write of my wretched position—of my being obliged to start on this wild journey, leaving this cloud above my home. I prefer to look to the future, and to hope that all will yet be well." He felt that he was behaving well, and, as much of the night now had gone, he went up-stairs, and in a short time was wrapped in a deep sleep.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE great steamer drove across the vast plain of the Atlantic, bearing John Maidment and his fort-

unes. At the first throb of the screw he felt relief ; he was away on his journey, and neither letters nor telegrams could reach him for ten days to come. The winds were light, and scarce a qualm interfered with his placid mood ; he had no acquaintance on board, and he could walk the deck or sit wrapped in his well-lined ulster considering in solitude his position and himself. If it sometimes occurred to him to doubt the excellence of some thing which he had done, he put the doubt aside with ease. It seemed as if he had attained that happy stage in which it is sufficient answer to the reviewing conscience to say, "It can not have been wrong, for it was I who did it," and to say this not with pain and grief of hot contention, but with the calm of full belief. Wrapped in his long overcoat and his ample virtue, John dismissed the occasional doubts of his conduct in this or that matter, confident that, had the thing not been just and right, he would not have done it.

As John reviewed the arrangements which he had made before starting, he could see little to criticise. He had set the little engines going which would best do his work, and he believed more fully that all must come right between his wife and him. He knew that she would suffer, as she deserved to suffer ; that she would beg for pardon, as it was her duty to beg. Now, when he was further from the crisis which had startled him, he counted with much less doubt on her love for him. Already she was feeling pangs of remorse ; for she knew that her conduct had sent her husband afar on his lonely journey without one word

from her of kindness or farewell. She would be eager to make any atonement, and would accept with zeal the story which he had left as an explanation of their separation. He felt that she was already looking forward, though she probably had not yet confessed it, to their next meeting. He trusted her love.

But John did not encourage his thoughts to look backward ; he liked to send them flying before the hurrying vessel, traveling without pause by sea and land, where he without pause would follow them. He felt a lively curiosity about his father, an eagerness to see him. The image which he had cherished as a boy, and which had faded not a little in the full days of his first contact with the world, leaped up bright and vivid. He recalled and gazed upon the vision of the fine fair face with the silky mustache ; he could almost hear again the light gay laugh ; he remembered that he had always known that his father was a charming man. He reminded himself that he would find this brilliant young person a man of more than fifty years, and, if Paul were right, with health somewhat damaged ; but the delicate lines, which showed the passage of time and work perhaps too hard for so fine a being, took nothing from the charm. He looked forward to adopting this delightful parent ; to bringing him to England and showing him to his friends with pride. He recognized too the convenient fact that Colonel Brent would be at all times glad of his old friend's presence, and that, when it was better for all parties that they should be only two at

home, Wilfred Maidment would live with his old admiring Philip. If this stroke of luck, of which Paul wrote, should with former earnings give a small income to the most pleasing of unknown fathers, then indeed all difficulties would disappear. But John would not allow his thoughts to dwell on this possibility ; he was quite ready to be generous to his father, and since his marriage he was able to be generous with a due regard to moderation and to the interests of his wife.

So John Maidment, easily thinking and imbibing the salt air, was borne on a prosperous voyage across the broad Atlantic, and with no rest passed from sea to land and so still westward in the cars. New York was to him no more than a great harbor ; a half-built bridge swung high in the air like the abandoned plaything of a giant ; docks and warehouses and straight streets—all seeming clean and clear, with smoke which did not brood and choke the city but went straight up and was lost in the cool far-off blue. At Chicago he caught a glimpse of what seemed a small city of piled logs, and in another part vast gaunt buildings for the storage of the golden grain. Then away he went again, carried steadily westward day and night—across the broad swift stream of the Mississippi ; through patches of charred stumps ; through regions of Indian corn ; through miles and miles of growing wheat ; with scarcely a man to be seen, and only here and there in the great solitude a white-painted wooden house, which seemed not to have been built into the soil, but to have been set ready-made

thereon by the careful fingers of a child. Then, when it had begun to seem the natural state of man to live his life upon a moving train, John passed from fertile lands to barren plain. He was beginning to suffer from restlessness, and he walked more often through the cars and stood on the wooden platform at the back of the train, finding a strange fascination in the two straight lines stretched, as it seemed, across half a world without a break and without a curve. Alone and conversing only with himself he was impressed more and more deeply by the immensity. Fresh from his crowded England he thought that here was room for superfluous millions; and over the wide-reaching land a wider heaven seemed to spread by day its cloudless blue, by night its myriads of more piercing stars.

Perhaps John had had enough of this journeying on and on, as if he were to go forever; perhaps, though he slept as well on board the train as on board the boat, he was beginning to suffer from the want of absolute rest. It is certain that he gave a sigh of relief when the cars stopped at Pueblo, and that he looked out with lively interest to see if Paul were there. He was disappointed, for no Paul was there, but, as he stood looking about him, a tall powerful man with a red beard and a watchful eye asked him if he were Mr. Maidment, and without further words offered him a letter.

"This business of your father's," Paul had written, "seems so pressing that I go on to Leadville at once by shortest route. My friend Hall takes his

buggy to Leadville over the Western Pass, which is just open, and he will take you with him."

John, who had been frowning over this note, looked up with a smile, and said, "Mr. Hall?" and the big man, who had been watching him, nodded rather shyly. He had been waiting to see if the Englishman was going to be friendly or "to put on frills." John was quick enough to feel that here in Colorado there was small wisdom in giving one's self airs of superiority. This gigantic owner of the buggy was by this ownership a better man than he; he appealed to him with an engaging air of helplessness to convey him as soon as possible to his friend Paul Brent. It was arranged that they should sleep that night at Colorado Springs, and start early on the next day for Leadville. The way through the cañon of the Arkansas River, by which Paul had gone, was decidedly shorter; but John, though he chafed a little at the thing being settled for him, was glad that he had not to face the Rocky Mountains for the first time alone. Besides, since Paul was already at work on his father's affairs, the delay of a day or two in his own arrival would do no harm. He went to bed in a bare room which opened straight on to the plain, and slept sound in a stationary bed and in the pure keen air of Colorado.

John woke early, for the room was full of clear light; and, when he opened his door, there were snow-capped peaks of the famous Rocky Mountains standing all of a row, glittering like mounds of salt and seeming so near that they tempted his quick blood to climb one before breakfast. It was lucky that he re-



sisted the temptation ; for, though his train ascending imperceptibly from the far-off Mississippi had climbed so high that John stared at these gleaming mountain-tops from a height of some six thousand feet above the sea, the nearest of the peaks was a long and a hard day's journey. But John was not busying himself with calculations of height nor with the effect on distance of that rare fine air. He only felt the new elixir in his blood, and breathed in a new vigor and a keener longing to be off. He was restless till the home-made buggy had appeared with its two sound plain-headed long-tailed horses, and till he was on his way with Mr. Sam Hall beside him and his portman-teau tied on behind them with a strong much-twisted rope. Up the long pass they went, slowly rising, meeting never a soul, listening to the little stream which hurried down under tangle of undergrowth and shade of well-grown fir-trees. The only sign that this was a way of men were the empty meat-tins which shone in an unbroken line by the roadside ; the only live creatures to be seen were the little striped chipmunks darting under the fallen trunks, or the blunt-nosed prairie-dogs who sat up and stared solemnly at them before they turned upside down into their homes. John was almost intoxicated by the wonderful air, which seemed as if no man had been there to breathe it since the golden age. He was so lively that he could not sit still, but jumped from the wagon and walked upward, humming fragments of tunes and feeling as if, were he to press his two feet hard upon the track, he might spring from the earth and float

upward to the amazement of science. When he began to fear that he might seem unsociable, he climbed again to his seat and talked to his companion.

Mr. Sam Hall, who was by this time almost convinced that he need not be on his guard against patronage, allowed himself to talk more easily. He answered John's questions, and even asked him a few in turn of a highly personal nature. He asked John where he was born and what he did for a living ; and, when the Englishman announced that he was a politician, he turned a humorous eye on him as if he expected an apology for so equivocal a profession. John laughed as he answered the slow questions of his mighty companion, and was glad to feel that his answers gave him the right of asking questions in turn. He was eager to know about the profits in cattle, the profits in corn, the life on the plains, the life in the mountains ; and he soon found that Mr. Sam Hall had had a large experience and had done pretty well in several ways. Mr. Hall, who had gone West as a boy from a village of Massachusetts, and whose form and voice had both been mellowed by long absence from the east winds of the New England coast, was a more important person than John had gathered from the first sight of his dull gigantic boots and of the old flannel shirt which was barely visible above his coat collar.

The pleasant chat by the way of these new comrades was interrupted by a small incident, which gave to the young Englishman a moment's shock. A prairie dog had sat up to stare, as so many of his

race had stared already, at the approaching vehicle, and in an instant he was dead, and John saw Mr. Hall returning his revolver to its place under his coat-tails.

"Why did you do that?" cried John sharply; he had started at this sudden shot; he was vexed at the unnecessary slaughter of this innocent-faced little beast.

"I kind o' felt like it," said the other after a minute's consideration. "I guess there are quite a number left," he added presently. But John was still annoyed as if by a jarring note in a high-pitched harmony of that exciting morning. His companion, with his air of a respectable small farmer, was so unlike the fancy pictures of the desperadoes of the Rocky Mountains, that it had not even occurred to him that there was a pistol of any kind concealed by those ample peaceful coat-tails. Not till they had descended from their chariot and had eaten their frugal meal of canned meat and bread by the side of the little clear stream which hurried through the underwood, did John recover his sympathy with his guide; but then, as he lay at length and listened to the stream, which prattled English like the brooks thousands of miles away, he felt friendly again, and, as he passed his flask of whisky to his mate, he smiled as if he were offering his friendship too. Thereupon another surprise was his, for Sam Hall shook his head, and being pressed announced deliberately that nothing under the bite of a rattlesnake would induce him to touch whisky. Sitting very straight with his great

legs straight before him, he declared to John, who observed him with keen interest, that there was no safety for the man who came West but total abstinence. Weary days and lonely evenings had changed many moderate men, whom he had known, into confirmed drunkards. He spoke gravely, though he used some picturesque and peculiar phrases; and, when he had ended, he emptied his mug of water and got up and shook himself, and went to see if his horses had fed properly.

It was evening when the travelers came out of the long pass up which they had been climbing since morning, and entered a widening plain. To John it seemed as if they had been carried far away into some English park. There were wide grassy lawns, softly sloping mounds, and clumps of trees which looked as if they must have been placed by the cunning of man for beauty's sake. Rolling slowly along on a half-seen track, they saw away on the right a reddish glow, and turning thither they presently came to a rough stone wall, and scarcely higher than the wall a rough stone house. Inside the inclosure besides this one-storied house there were sheds for horses and cattle and a sty for pigs. The contrast between this abode and the vast beautiful park, which to his English eyes was the fit surrounding of a palace, made John smile, but even as he smiled he felt how grim it was—this gray stone house squatting low in the fast-gathering shadows.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

THE owner of the ranch was a stolid Yorkshireman, who made the travelers welcome for the night with no apology for the roughness of his home or the coarseness of his fare. In the mountains it was a matter of course that any passer-by should have his share of food and a place for his blanket. More than this the Yorkshireman's dwelling-place did not afford; there was as little luxury within as beauty without. There were but three rooms, and a sort of den behind in which cooking was done; and when John passed through the front door into the center room he was struck by its bareness. A long rough deal table stood on the bare floor; one form of like kind was in its place by the table, but one end of the other had been dragged across to the corner of the fire, and on it three men were sitting, tired, silent, and smoking. The fire-light shone red, but rather sullen, on the bent figures of the smokers, their coarse worn clothes and long dirty boots; no one of the three made a movement when the strangers followed their host out of the darkness and he shut the door behind them. On either side of this central room a doorway with no door led into a room of the same size and shape, but these were only two caverns of darkness to John as he glanced curiously at them. It seemed strange to him that it was he who was there; he felt a faint excitement at this sudden entry of himself, the remarkable child of a complicated civilization, into a state of life

so primitive; he began to describe it to himself in picturesque words. It was evident that these slouching cowboys by the fire were smoking after their evening meal; for presently from his lair in the rear emerged the tall rough-headed youth, who was so little like a cook, bearing a portion of steak and a pot of coffee for the travelers, who were to sup alone. John had been made hungry by the keen mountain air, and succeeded in eating some of the tough meat without vegetables and in drinking the black coffee without milk, while the massive jaws of Sam Hall vanquished the rest of this Spartan meal without an effort.

When John had made an end of this fine exercise of mastication he looked about him; and by the light of the solitary candle in the iron candlestick, which the cook had brought in with their supper, he saw a book at the further end of the table, a book which was the library of the ranch. He fetched this valuable work, and bringing it nearer to the candle began to turn over the leaves. It was such a book as his Yorkshire host was likely to know well; it was full of colored prints of sporting scenes, and John was going through them slowly with half-attentive eye, when he was aroused by the voice of the Yorkshireman saying, with the first laugh which he had heard that evening, "So you've slept it off, have you?"

John looked up and saw opposite to him, in the empty doorway, a man who compelled his attention. It was no strength in this new-comer which exercised

compulsion : he was like weakness made man. Unlike Sam Hall and unlike these men at the ranch, he had made a feeble effort at the picturesque, as if at some time he had thought it right to dress the part of the wild ranger of the Rocky Mountains. His flannel shirt, soiled and stained, was of a deep red color ; about his shriveled waist was a cartridge-belt half full of cartridges ; his hat, in which he seemed to have been sleeping, had a width and flexibility of brim which might have been pulled into a becoming shape. But he had the look of one who had slept long in his clothes, and his trousers, which had half slipped from his belt, were flopping on his shapeless wry-heeled shoes. He stood swaying slightly in the doorway, and paid no attention to his host's question nor to the group of cattle-men by the fire.

One of these took his pipe from his mouth, and with a slow drawling voice said, "Dook, I guess this Englishman can tell you something of the other dooks."

The speaker nodded sideways at John, at whom the new-comer seemed to be staring, though the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat made it impossible to see his eyes. The other cowboys chuckled, and the Yorkshireman said to John, "They call him 'the dook,' because he kept such high-toned company at home. The boys stand him drinks, and he tells them stories of the aristocracy."

John looked at this poor devil with a cold contempt. He remembered what Sam Hall had told him by the way of the dangers of drinking in these wilds ;

if this man opposite had been really a gentleman, there was no need to look further for an example.

Presently the dook started himself from his doorway and came toward the table. Steadying himself opposite John, he plucked off his hat and allowed his head to drop ; perhaps he meant to greet him with a bow. His face thus exposed to the candle-light was the face of a fair man, and therefore more aggressively dirty than the face of a dark man could be. The hair of his head was thin and yellow-gray ; his beard was grayish-yellow, thin and straggling ; and while one end of his mustache drooped with a hopeless air, the other had been pulled out to a point as if by some old nervous habit of the slender grimy fingers. His cheeks were pale and his thin nose rather red, and he looked at John affectionately with a pair of pale-blue bloodshot eyes. Altogether the dook was at his lowest level of appearance ; and yet John felt sure that this disreputable loafer had been born and brought up as a gentleman. He looked round for Sam Hall, as if he would acknowledge the soundness of his statement on drink, but Mr. Hall had gone out to look after his horses.

The owner of the ranch had fallen asleep with his head on the table, and the men by the fire, seeing that no fun was to be got from the dook on that evening, had sunk back again to their silence and their smoking. John saw with amusement and vexation that he was probably condemned to a talk with this bibulous individual, who seemed to regard him with interest. The dook sighed, and then, as his eyes fell from



John's face to the book which he was reading, he smiled again. "Ah, what fun it was!" he said at the sight of the print full of red coats, and he gave a feeble imitation of a view holloa which ended in a hiccough. Jerked into a momentary gravity by this trifling accident he said with much self-satisfaction, "I knew you were English the moment I saw you. I knew it by clothes and things; it's unmistakable." He seemed to feel surprise at his rapid conquest of his last word; he tried to repeat it, failed, and laughed. Then he turned himself half round, and said, "This coat was made in England—some time ago. I suppose it's awfully old-fashioned by this time." He seemed anxious for John's verdict, and regarded him with a conciliating, an almost beseeching eye.

John looked at the greasy old coat, which was thrown back from the red flannel shirt, and said that it was a very good coat.

"One gets so rusty, you know, in these infernal mountains," said the dook piteously; and after a moment he added, looking sideways and smiling, as if he were begging for merciful consideration, "I suppose they wouldn't look at me now in any decent club."

It was not necessarily a question, and John hesitated. He did not like to go on lying, and he did not like to hurt the poor man's feelings; he might have said with perfect truth that the dook, if he entered any sort of club, was sure to be looked at. Hesitating, he looked across the table at the shrunken

soaked figure, and saw that a large tear was trickling down the thin red nose. His heart smote him; he wished that he could be more friendly, but, though he felt pity, the pity was no stronger than the contempt. To this young man it seemed almost incredible that a gentleman, with the start which birth and education give, should run down to this. The dook was looking at him furtively, piteously, with a watery smile, and, when John had brought out some encouraging words, he seemed on a sudden to take heart of grace. With a fatuous leer and a brief straightening of the figure he said, "They used to look at me—everywhere." He pulled out the stiffer end of his mustache to a finer point, and assumed a vanquishing air, and then with his head on one side, coaxing, he asked, "Don't the fellows ever speak of me? Haven't you heard 'em speak of me?"

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name," said John smiling.

"You don't know my name?" said the other, laughing feebly. "My name is Maidment—Wilfred Maidment."

John did not cry out. After a minute he shut his eyes, feeling a deadly sickness, and he presently moved his arms on the table as if he would assure himself that he were not dreaming nor paralyzed. Then he was seized by the strong desire to get away—to be alone and to think. He rose so quickly that he stumbled, and striking the iron candlestick sent the light rolling on the floor. "I beg your pardon," he cried out, and his voice sounded strange in his ears, and

hurrying to the door he pulled it open and went out into the night. He went beyond the wall, and then in the darkness he sat down upon the ground and pressed his two hands to his forehead, as if he would force his sickened brain to work. There he sat motionless till he was almost benumbed; and then the sudden fear of being ill made him stumble to his feet. The idea of being kept in this place by illness was terrible. He must go back to the house, or his absence would make the people wonder and questions would be asked about him. If they began to question Sam Hall, what might not be said? If he but spoke the word "Maidment!" what mischief words might do! He was half sick with fear when he thought that even now they might be talking. He was not afraid of being recognized. Though he had knocked over the candle in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation, he assured himself that he need have no fear of recognition; and yet no assurance could prevent the quivering of his nerves.

John stood in the darkness forcing his courage to the moving point. "He will be asleep now," he said to himself; "surely he will be asleep now." He forced his feet to take him to the door, and after listening for a moment he pushed the door softly open and went in.

The big fire was still burning red, but there was nobody in the room. John glanced with apprehension at the doorway in which the dook had first appeared; it was dark, and from within came the deep breathing of sleeping men. John guessed who was

sleeping there among these men, and turned to the opposite doorway, from which a pale light was still shining. He looked into the room and anxiously tried to see who were there. It was no easy job. Rude shelves were fitted low down against the wall, and on them lay the Yorkshireman and a couple of cowboys, each rolled in his big blanket. One of the boys had a lighted candle in his rough berth, and was reading an old newspaper which Sam Hall had brought in his capacious pocket. It was by the light of this smoky flame, which needed snuffing, that John peered at the sleepers. On the bare floor two mattresses had been thrown down, and on one of them two more men were lying. Though each was rolled in his blanket, John was sure that neither was slight enough for the form which he feared to see. On the other mattress, which was almost at his feet, the vast bulk of Mr. Hall was stretched, and John perceived that something less than half of the uninviting couch was left for him. He looked round once more, but could make out nothing else but a couple of colored prints from an old number of "The Illustrated London News," which one of the men had stuck above his sleeping-shelf; these were the only decoration of the house. He slipped off his coat and laid himself softly down on his dusty resting-place, disturbing no one of the weary dogs which lay and slept upon the floor among the weary men.

Presently the literary cowboy blew out his guttering candle, and there was no light in the place but a faint red reflection from the fire in the central room.

John lay and watched this dull illumination which slowly died. He could not turn over without touching his large neighbor ; and lying there upon the unswept floor among the men and dogs, he felt all his sensitive skin ac creep with strange sensations ; but neither want of room nor restlessness of body kept sleep from John Maidment's eyes. He had rolled up his coat for a pillow, but, had that pillow been the lace-edged comfort of the most luxurious of luxurious youths, he would not have slept that night. He lay and told himself that the night must end at last ; he could not help thinking, and to no purpose—thinking in vain he lay expectant of the tardy dawn.

At the first faint streak of light John rose, and in moving took care to wake his mate, who, accustomed to rise as soon as his eyes were open, got up, yawned mightily, and went again to his horses. John found a tin basin by the pump in the yard, and plunged his hot head into it, and felt better for a time. But the minutes were leaden-footed. He saw Sam Hall lead out his beasts, and he thought that the harnessing would never be finished. He went back to the house, and found the cowboys stirring, pulling on boots, taking their turns at the pump, swallowing quick breakfasts ; and all the time—the dragging, wretched time—he kept his eyes, which ached with sleeplessness, on that empty doorway, in which he feared to see that man. He thought that Hall would never have finished his hasty meal ; the few words of farewell which their host uttered seemed endless, and his comments on their team loud as a trumpet. The noise of the horses

at the door was enough to awaken the dead ; and all the time he was fearful of showing his impatience, which seemed always ready to break into a cry.

At last they could start ; and then in the last minute John could not help stepping to the doorway, which had been the center of his fears, and giving one glance into the room. Almost at his feet, stretched on a dusty mattress, lay the man heavily sleeping. He was wofully lean and pallid in the clear pitiless light ; his fallen jaw made his cheeks seem hollow as those of one starved. A great sob broke from John before he was aware, and terrified again, lest this sound should wake the sleeper, he turned and hurried away.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

“I GUESS you are pretty sick,” said Mr. Sam Hall, who had turned his open inquiring eye on his companion three or four times before he spoke. John had sat silent behind the patient horses, who had subsided from a shambling trot to the walk at which they accomplished their day-long journeys. He could think of nothing yet but of the distance, growing each moment greater, which separated him from the ranch ; and to the clear-seeing eye of his mate he looked haggard. Mr. Hall’s comment on his appearance made

him start, and made him uncomfortable ; the observant eye made him nervous. He jumped from the slow-moving wagon, and said that he should be better for walking.

John tramped forward through a somewhat desolate land. They were now some nine or ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, but they had entered a flat plain, one of the Rocky Mountain Parks, and all day long their track lay through miles of yellow grass. It was a sullen region, with nothing to arouse the mind from brooding thoughts. John wanted to think, but he was dull and stupid, and he had trudged along for some time before he began to think to any purpose. Little by little the keen exciting air and the steady movement, which stirred his blood, set his mind a-working with more life. He raised his head and turned and looked away behind him. They had left the ranch miles away ; there was no figure of a man upon the track. He knew that there was no chance of his being followed, and yet he could not help a feeling of relief when he saw the great bare plain. He was away ; he had gained time ; he could think. He knew that he must think now, for he must decide what he should do before he met Paul. Had he not decided already ? Could there be any doubt ? He asked himself the question, and cried out that there could be no doubt, as if from his inmost soul. It was impossible to take that man to England—to show such a man to the world as the father of John Maidment. And he had meant to be so proud of his father ! What an unlucky man he was ! He

pitied himself. What had he done that at the crisis of his career he should find this drag-chain about his feet? It was the very moment for pressing forward, and he was weighted with lead. Perhaps he should not be free for years to come; perhaps his career was ruined. Fortune with the finest irony had given him the golden mouth and the subtle brain, and had brought him all these thousands of miles to meet paralysis. He clenched his fists till he felt his nails in his palms; he looked after the buggy with hatred of this Hall who had brought him by this route. Had he gone by the shorter way, through the cañon of Arkansas, he would not have met the man—he might never have met him. But he had met him, and now he must decide. It was clear that he could not take him to England. Nobody could ask that. He imagined himself presenting him at Boucherett. Whatever else he decided, he had decided at least that the man must be left in the Rocky Mountains.

And it was better for the man himself to be left in the mountains. With this thought came the first comforting glow to the sickened heart of John Maidment. It would be cruel to take this poor man into a world for which he had become so woefully unfit. For his own sake he must be allowed to remain where he was. For his own sake too it were well that he should never know that he had seen his son. John remembered his pitiful questions about coats and clubs, and feared his foolish vain regrets, his timid longings for a vanished London life. He said to himself with decision that this poor fellow must never



know that he had met him. Nobody need know that they had met : his mere duty was silence.

And now John's plans began to take shape more readily. On the evening of the next day he would meet Paul in Leadville. If Paul did not know where Wilfred Maidment was, John would tell him that he could not wait, that he must get back to the railway by the shortest route, and so to England ; he would tell him so much of his disagreement with his wife as would explain the necessary shortness of his visit. He would leave everything to Paul ; the arrangements for the comfort of his father, when he had found him—as of course he would find him ; the arrangement of this mining business, whatever it might turn out to be. Only one thing he would take care to impress upon him—he must not send or bring his father to England till he had written to him and heard from him. Once in England and alone, John trusted to his logic and his eloquence, to the wise exhaustive letter which he would write, to convince Paul that, whatever else was settled, this poor unhappy man must remain in the mountains. If he found that Paul already knew where Wilfred Maidment was, John foresaw with annoyance that he must persuade his friend there and then that the one utterly unwise course—the impossible course—was to take his father with him to England. Of course it was impossible ; but he felt a sudden anger against Paul as he thought that it might be hard to convince him of the impossibility. He foresaw with keen annoyance that he might have to dash himself again, a sensitive live

being, against these stony Brents ; it was hard that his lot had been cast among these pig-headed, one-idead people.

But John was growing more hopeful now with every stride. He decided that Paul would have been so busy with Wilfred Maidment's business, which had called him so imperatively to Leadville, that he would not yet have found time to hunt for the man himself ; and so he, John, would get away to England, and get away alone, and would take good care that his father should not follow him. That was the one thing necessary, the one thing absolutely good for all parties. If this stroke of luck should be a real stroke of luck, the poor broken man would command all the comforts, even all the luxuries, which Colorado can afford. If the affair should be a disappointment, John promised himself that he would send money from England—money enough to secure for the unfortunate gentleman the sort of life which was most suitable for him. His imagination began to picture Wilfred Maidment as the lodger with some excellent family in Colorado Springs, carefully tended, kept clean and sweet, perhaps reformed. His imagination worked most nimbly at this labor of love, and there was the old man in the easiest chair, the center of most loving watchfulness, nourished by the finest air in the world, and spending his last days with every comfort which money could procure, and with the best of comforts, rest. To rob him of this, to transplant him to an atmosphere for which he had become wholly unfit, would be mere madness. John was certain of this.

At the mid-day halt Sam Hall saw that his companion was better, and, observing that he ate with a fine appetite, he dismissed all anxiety and himself ate with a finer. In the afternoon they sat sociably again side by side and talked of Indians and rattlesnakes and other unpleasant creatures, which Mr. Hall seemed to have arranged in one class ; and so journeying they came in the evening to a sort of large packing-case, unpainted and unpolished, which had been set up for the accommodation of travelers at the foot of the Western Pass.

In this bare deal hostelry they supped on the hash of the country, and a little later rolled their blankets about them in a tiny cabin, which they were lucky enough to have to themselves. John after his last wretched night slept heavily, but he awoke at dawn with a dream yet vivid with him, and sat up, trembling and listening for horses on the road. He was unquiet till they had started again and were climbing the Pass. The air was more and more rare and roused him to an unnatural excitement. He was in and out of the buggy a dozen times ; he found himself breathing more quickly, almost panting as he walked ; the points of his fingers were cracked ; far-off objects seemed almost within reach of his hand. All along a long mountain-side was a forest of charred poles, where a fire had walked devouring ; beyond the path of the flame the green firs came thronging up the slopes in armies, and above the masses of dark green glittered the mounds and peaks of white eternal snow. Here and there lay the carcase, slow to decay, of some

dead over-driven beast, and tainted for a moment of passing the keen sweet air. At the top of the Pass the track was still difficult, and the horses slipped upon the melting ice and frozen snow, but as they began to descend again they moved more freely and were soon shuffling through the dust at a slow trot toward Leadville. Ten thousand feet or so above the sea, on the side of a long shallow valley, which lies among the tops of the Rocky Mountains, stands the city of Leadville.

When John Maidment saw it, it was the youngest, as it is the highest, town in the world. Indeed, it was some two years old, and boasted, for it had begun to speak, of forty thousand inhabitants, of whom very few were women. Men had come there from all parts, thousands of men, though the forty thousand was without doubt a pardonable exaggeration—each man hungry for silver and ready to give his life, if need were, in defense of his claim. Indeed, though the miners were for the most part peaceful and industrious, working with grim determination and keeping their weapons concealed, there were almost as many revolvers as men, and murder was a lighter crime than robbery. To punish a thief, men who had not been robbed would tear themselves from the pursuit of treasure and ride day and night till they had killed him for an example. Everywhere were signs of the hunt for silver. The bleak rocky slopes were marked with holes and with earth flung out as if by the hind feet of gigantic rabbits; and, where the hole in the ground had been the door of fortune, it was covered

by a great shed with its name as a full-grown mine painted thereon. Above the infantine city stretched a long belt of dark green forest of firs, and from this forest the city had been hewn, a city of brand-new deal boxes all of a row, unstained by moisture in that dry preserving air, unpainted and unpolished by the hand of man. Close above the belt of trees was powdery dazzling snow, which looked so near that it seemed as if one could put one's hand into it. There was no distance, no mist, no moisture in that clean shallow cradle where the baby town lay high up among the topmost heights of the unchanging snow.

It was a busy time that year in Leadville, and there were not many loafers in the dusty street, when John Maidment and Sam Hall came at a meritorious trot and stopped before the biggest of all the wooden packing-cases, which was the hotel. A disreputable individual, who was smoking jerkily by the door, removed his pipe to say, "The town is full of Tender-feet," and to spit; but John had hardly time to think if this were meant as a sign of dissatisfaction with his appearance before he heard a quick step in the passage, and saw Paul, the friend of his boyhood, coming quickly and with a fine blush, which showed itself through all the deep burning of that ardent sun.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN he had shaken hands with Sam Hall and had made him promise to take his evening meal with him, Paul grasped John by the arm and led him away through passages, which creaked under their feet, to the bedroom which he had secured for him. There was only one chair, and that was somewhat rickety ; so Paul sat on the bed and stared at John and felt pity for him, thinking that he looked ill and nervous and older than he should. Paul himself looked stronger than of old. He seemed to have expanded in every way in the spacious Western world ; he was like a straight young sapling to which judicious clearing of encumbering growths had given a more generous portion of air and light. The long legs were stronger, the shoulders broader, and the chest deeper ; and with more strength there was more freedom too. His head moved more easily on his neck than Brent heads were wont to move, and the Brent muscles looked as if in this specimen of the race they could be used more effectively and more quickly. The tall, fair, and rather stiff lad had gained more breadth and ease in manner as in body. Decided and confident, he was friendly also ; he had lost a great deal of his early fear of showing feeling. In his life on the Plains he had rubbed shoulders with all sorts of folk and had rubbed off some portion of the family reserve : in long silent days and evenings

he had learned to regard human speech with less severity. And yet, though he felt as if he had a great deal to say to his old friend, he had changed so little from the reserved boy of former days that he found it hard to begin.

John could not sit down ; he was waiting in an agony for the other to speak. He walked up and down the little room restless, impatient, indignant with the Brent slowness of speech. Only a few minutes had passed since he followed Paul into the room, but he felt as if he had restrained his tongue for an hour, when at last he blurted out the question which had been in his mind so long. "Have you seen my father?" he asked, and the anxiety in his voice seemed to Paul natural enough.

"No," he said ; "he has gone away from Leadville, and I can't tell where."

John could not restrain a deep sigh, which expressed his relief. He sat down in the rickety chair and leaned his arms on the table ; he was apparently examining the great crack which divided the table from end to end ; he moistened his lips before he spoke again, and did his best to speak with a sufficiently careless air.

"It's a bore," he said, "that I can't wait while you look for him. I am bound to get back at once to England ; I ought not to have come, but I could not help coming after your letter ; I could only give myself just time to get here and back."

He looked up when he had made an end of this speech and saw Paul's surprise and regret ; he felt that

he must go on, and, before Paul could speak, he began to tell him that a difficulty had arisen between his wife and himself; that, though it was about nothing, mischief might follow if he did not put it right; that he could not bear to be away longer. Paul saw in this statement the explanation of his friend's ill looks. He stretched his hand across the table and laid it on John's. "You are quite right," he said; "it's an awful pity, but of course you are right. When must you go?"

"I must start at once," said John anxiously, "at once—to-morrow—by coach and rail down the cañon. I'll leave everything to you, and you will let me know at once when you have found him. Of course I leave everything to you."

Paul pressed his hand again; he was full of silent sympathy with his friend.

"There's only one thing," continued John, "which I need say, and that is, that of course you won't bring or send him to England till you have heard from me that—that it is possible." He was drumming on the table with restless fingers and watching them with apparent interest, but, hearing no comment from Paul, he looked up at last with ill-concealed anxiety. Paul was pondering:

"But I can't promise that," he said at last.

"What?" cried out John sharply.

"I can't promise—how can I? If I find him ill and—and wretched?"

John could say nothing in answer, for before his eyes arose a vivid picture of the poor wretch whom he



had seen two days before ; the picture stopped his tongue.

"Of course, if he were like that, I could not wait for letters," said Paul ; "I should take him clean out of this and straight away to you in England."

John was too sick for argument at the moment ; he felt the resolution of this other man like a weight on his tongue ; he could only take some dismal comfort in the thought that he was going away to-morrow and that, when he had got safe away, it was likely that his flow of words would come back to him—that then he would prove by an eloquent letter to this stiff-necked friend of his childhood that it was in all ways best for Wilfred Maidment to end his days in Colorado. At least he would make it clear that he could not and would not receive this wretched man in England. He was savage with the wretched man—savage with Paul, who was regarding him across the narrow table with irritating sympathy—savage with Fate.

"The truth is," said Paul presently with one of his old blushes, "that I've a poor account of your father. They say he's in a bad way, broken down with disappointments and with—in fact, that he's been drinking more than he ought. If that's so, he ought not to stay here another hour. Drink plays the devil in this air ; it ruins half the men who come West. Besides, well or ill, your father should be taken away. They say he's always had a tribe of loafers and worse about him, and now, when he has plenty of money, they would simply live on him."

"Plenty of money !"

"Oh, yes, he has plenty now ; I told you."

"You told me of some stroke of luck. Has it really turned out to be something ?"

"A million or so," said Paul smiling.

"What ?" cried John with a sharp ring in his voice.

"It would fetch a million now."

"What would ? What is it ?"

"The mine."

"My father owns a mine worth a million ?"

"Dollars."

"A million dollars—how much is that— What is it in pounds ?"

"About two hundred thousand," said Paul ; "it's probably worth a good deal more."

"My father !" said John, with that vision of his parent again clear before his eyes. His hands clutched the rough table so hard that his fingers were dead-white ; he was hungry for details ; his eyes fastened on his friend's face, imploring him to speak.

Paul felt as uncomfortable as if he had detected some deformity in this man, who had been the ideal of his boyhood. He turned his eyes away as he began the little tale, and he told it with his most matter-of-course air, as if it were of small importance. It was one of those rare stories of luck, which go like fire from man to man and kindle greed, while the histories of the thousands who grub for silver till they die and barely pay their expenses are untold. The dook with almost his last handful of dollars had bought a hole in the ground from a rascal who thought he had

gulled him ; he had left it alone and almost forgotten it ; at last one day, possessed by some strange fancy for labor, he had gone in and dug, and had dug scarce a foot deeper when he found pay dirt ; and this had turned out to be no meager allowance, such as rewarded the labors of many a Colorado miner, but a great rich store of silver, which was certainly a fortune and might be one of the best mines in the place.

John Maidment heard the story of his father's luck, and as he listened his thoughts were flying. Why had he not known this when he met his father ? It was the finest chance, and he had lost it. If he had only known of this wonderful thing, he could have taken possession of his father then and there and could now take him away at once from all danger of plunderers. What cruel luck, that he had not known ! If his father should remember that he had told him his name and that he had gone away without a word—gone like a stranger, without even the leave-taking of a chance acquaintance ? He told himself that his father would not remember—would not know that he had known him as his father. Nobody must know that he had recognized him that night. He must get back to him somehow ; he must get hold of him and guard him. His fingers twitched ; he could scarcely stay in his chair. "Is it true ?" he asked ; "is it really true that he has all that ?"

"Yes, it's all right," said Paul rather impatiently.

"But you said there was some hitch ? Why did you hurry up here from Pueblo ?"

"I heard at Pueblo that it was a big thing and

that Sark, the wretched chap who sold it, was making a fuss."

"Then there is a difficulty," said John angrily—"what does he say?"

"He says one day that he never sold it, and another day that your father promised him half profits. He tells several stories, all different and all lies. Luckily, he thought he was doing your father when he sold the thing, and so he took care that the sale was all correct. I've looked into it thoroughly; he hasn't a leg to stand on."

"But has he given it up? Has he withdrawn his claim?"

"He is hanging on in the hope of getting something to keep him quiet."

"Give him something," cried John; "surely that's the thing to do; there can be no question."

"If you like," said Paul grudgingly. "The fellow is a liar and a bully and not worth sixpence; but of course you can promise, if you like, to use your influence with your father to give him something."

"Yes I think so," said John quickly; "I think that's the thing to do. Where is he? Where could I find him?"

"I know where we can find him to-night."

"Where?"

"Did you see that pretty scoundrel who spat just as you drove up to the door?"

"Yes," said John.

"That's Mr. Garbets; he is Sark's jackal and

toady ; he came to invite me to a conference with his chief at a drinking-den just out of the town."

"Are you going?"

"I said no ; but we can go if you like."

"Yes, yes—the sooner the better."

"Before he gets anything, he must give his written statement that he has not a ghost of a claim on the thing. Poor devil ! He is a very hard ticket, but it was hard luck to be within a few inches of a fortune." Paul had got off the bed and come round the table, and as he passed behind John's chair he laid his hand a moment on his shoulder and pressed it, as if he would bid him not to worry. He felt as if there was something wrong with his friend and he wanted to help him. "I'll leave you for a bit now," he said, "and look for Hall. We'll meet at supper, and then if you like we'll go and settle Mr. Sark."

"All right !" said John with an effort at ease and friendliness. He was eager to be alone.

John was in a feverish state, which would have surprised himself had he had time to think of it. This tale, so baldly told, had seemed to him like the dry bones of a romance gorgeous as all the East. To-day a beggar ; to-morrow a millionaire. His fancy was hanging the bare framework, with all its silks and jeweled lamps ; while all the time he heard the whisper that nothing was sure till the mine was sold and the money paid, and he had the money and his father safe at home in England. Nobody had ever accused him of avarice. He had always known that wealth was the most important thing in the England of to-

day—that it doubled the weight of any man who was in public life. The clever politician, who was rich too, commanded a respect and carried a weapon for which John had not hoped. He had not wasted his thoughts on this matter, for he had never expected to be a rich man. By his marriage he had secured independence, and he had been content ; he had rid himself of that flavor of the adventurer which well-to-do Britons of all classes suspect in the politician with the slender purse. A fat purse is the ensign of respectability. John had looked for nothing more ; but now his father was a rich man, and he was his father's heir. A latent chord of greed was struck ; he longed to handle the price of the mine—to feel the power which he would wield—of course for the best ends.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN the friends had finished their supper and Paul and John were ready to go in search of Mr. Sark, it appeared that Sam Hall had made up his mind to join the party. He remarked that he had considerable experience of the hardest kind of hard tickets, and he guessed he'd go along too. So the three men stepped out together and stepped out briskly, for in those high regions, in early May, the nights are piercing keen and clear. John felt happier, for he was making the first step toward the set-

tlement of this thing, which unsettled made him restless and eager as a thirsty man in the desert who sees palm-trees in the distance.

The town was now full of miners, who had done their day's work, going in and out of the gambling-sheds which stood open to the street, paying great prices for goods at a flaming gas-lit store—a moving crowd remarkable among crowds for its silence, and, as it seemed, most orderly and harmless. But when the three friends had left the town, the dusty road, by which the buggy had approached Leadville some hours before, lay desolate and dusky before them. They had not far to go, and, walking briskly, they soon came to a rough shanty by the wayside, and could hear in the great silence a noise of voices and of oaths, which seemed to indicate a merry meeting. Paul, uncertain if this were the trysting-place to which he had been bidden by the unsavory Garbets, struck a light and read with more distinctness the irregular black letters which had been painted above the low door. "Smile twice for two bits," was the pleasant invitation which the simple vendor of drinks addressed to the passing traveler ; and this enigmatical tavern-sign seemed to content Paul, for he pushed open the door and, stooping his head a little, went in. At the opening of the door a fine full blast of the fumes of bad whisky rushed out into the cool clear night, and John, with a sudden disgust, followed his friend into the place. Sam Hall came in last, and, with a large toleration of the tastes of the patrons of the establishment, shut the door behind him.

It was a mere shed with a lean-to at the back, which the enterprising proprietor had built for himself as a temporary place of business and with the strictest economy ; for it was as clear from the nature of his dwelling, as from the price and quality of his liquor, that this merchant had not (to use the language of the country) come there for his health. If to drink was to smile, as his sign seemed to announce, he may have reflected sometimes, with a certain irony, that there was no promise that the smile should not be a grin of anguish. The worthy man was doing a roaring trade ; these were good times in Leadville, and money was plentiful ; and the gayer spirits found a charm in this suburban retreat, where the liquor was the fiercest to be had at the price, and where the grimmest pleasantries prevailed and the very tallest stories were told.

They were but a small company who on that evening had created so spirituous an atmosphere. Some half a dozen men sat on empty boxes which had held whisky, or leaned against the rickety counter, which concealed the legs of the enterprising host.

When Paul entered, followed by his friends, Mr. Sark broke short an oration, which he was delivering to his own satisfaction, and carefully directed his attention to the new-comers. He was in that stage of intoxication which produced in him an air of dignity and a love of rhetoric. Having convinced himself of Paul's identity, he addressed the company again and congratulated them with a fine sweep of the arm and an irony perhaps less fine on the presence of "these



fine-haired men " at their humble meeting ; he expressed his readiness to move a resolution of thanks. Paul, in answer to the stern inquiring eye of the host, asked for drinks, and then, fixing his eye on Mr. Sark, said that they had come on business, and suggested that they should go outside and discuss it. Mr. Sark however had a constitutional preference for a stove-heated whisky-scented air, and declared with an access of dignity that he had no secrets.

" All right," said Paul. " My friend here is John Maidment, son of Wilfred Maidment."

" And why did not the old man come himself ? " asked the other with a plaintive drawl. " I hev been a good friend to the dook, and he'd a done better to hev come to his old friend fair and square and not have gone lounging off to a darned lawyer at the Springs."

" How do you know he has gone to the Springs ? " asked Paul quickly.

" Oh, it's a secret, is it ? " said Mr. Sark, scornfully. " Well, I guess I know something," he added with pride. " I know the dook started clear out of Leadville a week since over the Western Pass, and, if he ain't either dead or drunk, he is at Colorado Springs by now."

By this time John had reached the limit of endurance. This reeking den filled him with disgust ; the staring silent men in their slouched hats affected his nerves ; the familiarity of Mr. Sark made him sick. That this ruffian should speak with an air of patron-

age of John Maidment's father! And then there came back to him again the image of that father, and he felt the horror of his degradation and in the next moment the longing to secure him. He noted as a piece of luck that Paul had been put on the track of Wilfred Maidment without any hint from him; he had only to find a reason for putting off his journey to England and going back again with his friend over the Western Pass; they could not fail to find his father. Meanwhile this place was unendurable; he felt that no further good would come of the interview; he loathed this festive company. He pulled Paul's coat-sleeve, and Paul, quite ready to come to the point with the fewest words needful, came a step nearer to Mr. Sark and said, "It's a plain matter; you know as well as I know that you have no claim on the mine."

"What?" shrieked Mr. Sark, as if somebody had flicked him with a whip; and the sympathetic Garbets, who was sitting in a heap in a corner, uttered a note of scorn.

"But my friend here," continued Paul, "thinks it hard luck for you to have been so near to a good thing and to have lost it; and so, if you will just write on a bit of paper that you have no claim whatever on the mine, he will promise you in his father's name two thousand dollars."

"Two thousand dollars! Two thousand dollars for what will be worth two millions! Why, you—"

Here Mr. Sark became speechless from excess of emotion; he was choked with wrath, and grew purple

and danced upon the floor, until at last the pent-up agony found expression in an intricate web of blasphemies, so various and so rich in color, that it is doubtful if the most hardened sinner present had ever heard the like.

At last it was finished, and Paul said with even more coldness, "That's the offer ; you can take it or leave it."

"And it is this blank, blank Tenderfoot—this son of that soaked old fraud and darned deadbeat Wilf Maidment who—"

Mr. Sark paused, feeling perhaps that any words were poor after his late magnificent outburst, but he had said enough to make silence no longer possible for John. He ground his teeth, but the word "scoundrel" seemed to force its way through and sounded with startling distinctness.

"What?" barked Sark with a bound.

"'Scoundrel!' he said," cried out Paul, and in the same moment he knocked Mr. Sark down, and following his blow threw himself upon him and grasped his right arm with all his force till he felt the muscle grow limp. An awful flow of curses broke from the fallen man, whose arm was bent under him, while Paul forced him on to his face and took from his white fingers the pistol which they had grasped in the quick moment before the blow.

Sam Hall had stepped past John, and stood with a grim smile waiting for further events ; but nobody seemed eager to carry on the game. Mr. Garbets confined himself to incoherent curses, singing second

as it were to his accomplished chief; the other men present scarcely changed their positions. Indeed, the great Sark was not a popular man, and such respect as he commanded was solely due to his reputation with the revolver.

"Paul has been there before," said Sam Hall to John, when it was clear that the incident was finished.

"What did the villain want?" asked John in much excitement; "what did he mean to do?"

"I guess he meant to kill you for calling names, and he would have done it in about half a minute if our friend had not got there first."

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

CERTAINLY Paul Brent and his comrades retreated with the honors of war; and Paul himself, like a Homeric hero, bore from the field of battle the arms of the fallen foe. Unlike the heroes of that child-like age, he neither boasted himself exultant nor adorned himself with the spoils; he shoved the revolver into his trousers pocket and strode home with grave thoughts. John hurrying beside him was in a fever of excitement. He could scarcely yet realize the meaning of the quick struggle which he had seen—could scarcely yet believe that, instead of walking and breathing there with the hot blood tingling in him from head to heel, he might be lying cold and feeling

nothing. Excitement after excitement had come to him in the last few days, but this last swallowed up them all for the time being—that he had been cheek by jowl with death. Was it really so near? Paul laughed it off; but Sam Hall let John know that Paul had seen Sark's hand move for the pistol-pocket in his rear, and on that sign had struck. Hall thought it well that this elegant young stranger should know that he owed his life to his friend—that, had Paul's arm been less quick or a yard farther from Mr. Sark's head, John Maidment's eloquent tongue had wagged its last on earth. It ceased to move now, for awe fell on John and he was glad to walk forward in silence and to know that he was alive.

When they had reached the hotel, he followed Paul to his room, and there thanked him from a full heart. He spoke simply and truthfully, and the two men clasped hands with as simple trust and love as if they had been boys again. And then, since the easy gates of speech were open, John glided easily to that which had to be said. He declared that after all he could not leave Paul yet, but must go with him to find his father; if there were a divided duty, he was sure now that he must find his father before he went back to his wife; and he thought that, when he had found him, he had better take him away, as Paul had advised, from a place so full of peril. Paul cordially approved his friend's new decision; he was eager to bring father and son together, and to pack them both off safe to England; he had been considering, as he walked home, how many days would pass before Mr.

Sark would be able to use his right arm effectively ; he counted on a week, and hoped for more. And now, as John had slid so easily over this difficulty and was warmed by his friend's approval of his change of plan, he was inspired to pass without a pause to a half-confession. It seemed as if he were carried into it by quick-coming appropriate words ; and he found himself telling Paul that he had seen at the ranch, where he had slept on the way up, a poor broken man who had seemed strangely familiar to him, and that, since he had heard the poor account of his father, he had been haunted by the belief that that poor broken man was he. The danger through which he had passed, and the sudden inspiration to which he now yielded, brought a sob into John's voice, which touched an old chord in his friend. Paul had been pained by the change in John, though he would not let his thoughts dwell upon it. His old belief in the infallibility of John Maidment was dead long ago with the glad confident morning of their boyhood, but it had left a great tenderness ; and, as some gentle eyes will not bear to observe with a too curious scrutiny the lines which Time has writ upon a face once loved, so Paul turned his thoughts with a fine modesty from a deliberate criticism of his friend. It was enough to say that John looked ill, that he was not himself. And was it not natural that a man should look ill, harassed, almost old at times, who had traveled day and night from Mayfair to Leadville, from an offended wife to a disappointing father ; who had heard without preparation the news of in-

toxicating fortune, and, with wealth almost in his hand, had been within a second of death? John was not himself, Paul thought, and it was no wonder. But yet some warmth of sympathy had been wanting; and it was only now, when John confessed his fear that he had seen his father, and his voice broke in the confession, that Paul felt the deep joy of giving his sympathy in full measure. He did not say much, but he said more than he could have forced from his lips in his Oxford days, and they were good encouraging words. He declared that John's father would bloom in the old atmosphere to a new health and new habits of life; that it would be a glad day for his own father when he could welcome Wilfred Maidment again, and a real joy for him to be allowed to take charge of his old friend as often and for as long a time as John would allow.

John felt better, and would have gone on talking far into the night, but Paul would not. He had settled with Sam Hall, who seemed able to refuse him nothing, that the team should be ready at the first glimpse of light, for he wished by traveling from dawn to dark to reach the ranch in a single day.

It was a long day's journey and uneventful, and John, sitting silent in the buggy and staring at mile after mile of the familiar track, sank now and then into a sort of drowsy unbelief in the reality of these wonders, which he had heard and seen. Indeed he was tired; strange events and exciting air had robbed him of his proper sleep; he was oppressed by extraordinary periods of silence. But when they drew near

to the low stone house, which he had left three days ago with such strange feelings, his mind sprang up alert. In a few minutes he would see again the bare rough room where he had looked up across the narrow table and heard his father's name from those tremulous lips, which were his father's. Was he still there? In a few minutes he might see him again—in what condition? In a few minutes he might be trying with all his faculties to read in his father's face whether he remembered that he had told his name—whether he knew that he John Maidment, recognizing his father, had gone away without a word. He was in an agony of doubt. In a minute they would meet. Perhaps his father, learning who he was, would know clearly that he had told him his name; perhaps he would not even see that this son of his was the same man to whom he had chatted so freely three days ago. John could not be sure; it seemed as if these lagging horses would never reach that low-lying cluster of gray, dismal walls.

It was Paul who asked the question, and John who listened for the answer with an anxiety which was almost acute pain. The owner of the ranch, with his deliberate North-country manner, informed them that the dook was still there—that he had not yet felt strong enough to go on. He was glad to let him lie and to feed him as well as he could, but he strongly advised his removal to more luxurious quarters. He stated his belief that no woman had ever been in the house, and his suspicion that when a man was ill a woman might be useful; he seemed more certain that



sheets and such things would alleviate a sick man's condition. It was clear enough from his amiable but contemptuous manner of speaking of his guest that he had no suspicion that he had entertained a millionaire unawares. Indeed he too had come to this region not for his health's sake ; he had little leisure for listening to gossip, and, since this property of his lay far away from the common track to Leadville, small opportunities of hearing it.

Paul bent his head in the vacant doorway which united the center room to the sleeping-den on the left, and John followed him with quaking heart. One glance was enough to show him that he need fear no vehement reproaches. His father lay on the same old dirty mattress, whereon he had left him so short a time ago, turning and going away with the unspoken hope in his heart that he should see his face no more. A few days had passed and he was here again, peering by the uncertain light at the wan fallen face, trying to decide how weak he was and how much life was in him. He thought that the poor creature looked worse than when he saw him last, but this might be a mere ebb which a flow must follow ; and, as he looked, he was smitten suddenly with pity that he should be staring in this dismal place at a poor wretch sleeping like a tired tramp at home, and that this should be his father. He turned away with a sob and caught Paul's hand, and Paul wrung it with a painful pressure, for he could not speak. Paul was thinking of his own father far away in England, and the thought deprived him of speech ; that loyal gentle-

man at home had loved this man so well and been so firm a friend to him ; and here he lay, after all, a poor, weak, degraded creature, flung on the floor like a bundle of greasy clothes. The young Englishman's eyes filled with unaccustomed tears as he looked at his father's friend.

On the next morning it became clear that Wilfred Maidment's only strength was in a perfect indifference to Fate. He looked at those new-comers who had watched him in his sleep, and did not seem to care a jot whether they came or went, spoke or were silent, left him on his mattress, or carried him away. He was so weak that Paul gave him some brandy from John's flask, and this seemed to be a sufficient reason for the dook to repose entire confidence in Paul. He followed him gratefully with his watery eyes, and he feebly smiled acquiescence when he heard that he was to be carried down at once to Manitou ; he was looking at his new friend's pocket while he smiled, and he would have smiled no less amiably if the new friend had decreed that he should be taken post haste to Jericho.

So Paul busied himself with making as good a bed as he could in Sam Hall's buggy, and when everything was ready they brought out the poor gentleman and started down the trail at a foot's pace, Sam Hall driving with his feet on the pole and the two younger men walking ; and so they came in good time to Manitou, which was by some miles nearer than Colorado Springs. Manitou was beginning to have a little reputation for strengthening the delicate with its fine mountain air

and its iron spring ; and besides a few small houses dotted on the slope, there had sprung up a big brand-new wooden house, which was nothing less than a hotel with a piazza, a supply of clean linen, a young clerk, and no mean show of the luxuries of hotel civilization. There Paul, who had been obliged to repeat his doses of brandy two or three times on the journey, carried his charge to a bare clean bedroom on the second floor, washed him unresisting, and put him to bed in clean sheets. The feeling of the sheets seemed to carry Mr. Maidment back to other days ; he began to cry silently, and looked at his attendant with beseeching eyes. But Paul would not comfort him with more alcohol ; he only responded to the appeal by smoothing his pillow and his poor old faded hair, sitting patient and watchful till his charge had fallen asleep.

And now began a trying time for John Maidment. He had looked on Maniton as but the first resting-place in the journey to England ; but day followed day, and the invalid could not be moved. A woman had been found to look after him, but her duties were light, for he preferred to be nursed by Paul ; and Paul gave almost all his time to him. He lay weak (it was a question if he did not grow a little weaker every day), but with a much more respectable air ; for he was washed and brushed and tended with the nicest care, and in his calmer hours he looked like a model old gentleman lying patiently on the best mattress of the hotel and feeling the sheet tremulously with his thin nervous fingers. There were other times when

he did not seem like a model old gentleman—times when he set himself coughing by the vehemence of his Rocky Mountain language, when he first shrieked and then whined for spirits, and would not be comforted by those substitutes which the doctor provided.

The doctor, who had come to this lonely place for his own health, discovered a very interesting combination of maladies in the poor old patient; but Sam Hall went to the root of the matter when he guessed that Mr. Maidment was just burnt up and worn out. When he was in a bad mood, nobody had any influence with him but Paul, and nobody had so bad an effect as his own son. Indeed at all times John's presence seemed harmful to his father; and he was glad to keep away, for the sick man had an ill effect on him too. It seemed as if each could feel the presence of the other, as if some family element common to both overcharged the air of the sick-room. It is true that in his vaguer moments Wilfred Maidment seemed to forget that he had ever had a son; but presently he would look at his son so shrewdly, that John felt as if he remembered clearly every detail of that unlucky evening at the ranch when he had known him and made no sign. Wilfred's calmness would give way to impatience; and John would go away pale and unquiet to assure himself that his father was too ill to have any clear conception of what had passed between them. He walked about or tried to read, and wondered how long this state of things would last, and what would come of it. He was sorry for himself

and sorry for his father too ; he was obliged to leave him to Paul ; and surely he could not distrust Paul.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

SOMETIMES, when Mr. Maidment was alone with Paul and feeling comfortable, he would become sprightly. Then his topic was himself, and he would exhibit himself, as it were, against old backgrounds, which were stored away like theatrical properties in his musty old memory. He had belonged to exclusive clubs ; he had moved in exclusive circles ; he had been admired by delightful women. He looked at Paul doubtfully, as he babbled about the great houses wherein his elegant figure had moved, or hinted at successes with the fair ; he watched his sole auditor with doubt, and with a sort of plaintive prayer to be believed. He told the social stories which had gained him a name in the mountains and plenteous drinks withal. He had cared little whether his Western hearers had believed him or not ; but now there had come to him a young Englishman, who must have seen or at least heard of these clubs and palaces, the desired Park and Piccadilly, and it seemed to the poor dook essential that his new friend should believe that he had been in his day a real swell.

The stories were true enough ; but the poor story-

teller could not rid himself of the haunting fear that to the initiated they must seem false. His wan old face and feeble eyes were always mutely appealing to Paul for an assurance that it did not seem impossible that he had been an arbiter of taste and a man of fashion. As he hinted of his conquests, his trembling skinny fingers went in obedience to old habit to the faded wisp of mustache, and he simpered till he showed the gaps among his handsome teeth.

Paul used to blush as he pretended interest in those musty stories of the town; and he did some violence to his conscience when he pictured for the invalid a nice place in the country, which he should buy with some of his new wealth, and where he should entertain his friends of former days. "Only make haste to be strong," he said one day when Mr. Maidment's gayest mood had been followed by a sudden depression; "only get strong, and we'll take you to England and set you up with a house, and a place, and horses, and—and all that."

The poor gentleman looked at him rather strangely, and then looked at his hand, which was almost transparent against the light of the window. "I should like a week in Paris," he said, "with lots of money. It's come too late—it's come too late," and he began to cry.

Paul could not bear this sight. He got up from his chair beside the bed with a few incoherent words of consolation, and went and stared out of the window, waiting till the poor gentleman's sniveling should end in lethargy.

On this occasion, however, the patient's mind was strangely alert ; the unusual thought of wealth so long desired, and now his own, had led to another thought at least as unusual. He called fretfully to the young man at the window, and Paul turning saw a faint color in his cheek and agitation in his eyes and fingers.

"I don't see why," he said, "I shouldn't pay my debts to your father." He had done with his crying, and now spoke with weak defiance, as if he were making a suggestion which could not but be combated as extravagant.

Paul was certainly astonished. It was no surprise to him that his father had lent Wilfred Maidment money ; though as was natural, his father and he had never spoken on the subject. But he was surprised that the idea of repayment should have been so clear to Mr. Maidment that it had found expression in words. He stared at his patient and could not tell what to say ; he tried to decide how his father would have received such a suggestion.

The dook was irritated by this silence ; he had grasped this idea, which charmed him by its novelty, and he clung to it with obstinacy. He began to distress himself at this silence, which seemed like opposition. "They're debts of honor," he said, "debts of honor—damme, man, you wouldn't have me neglect my debts of honor !"

His voice went up into a quaver, and Paul to soothe him said that, if he owed his father anything, he could pay him of course.

"If I owe him !" cried Mr. Maidment ; and he

would not be pacified till he had told Paul of loan after loan which the Colonel had sent him since his first coming to America.

There were limits to the poor gentleman's memory, even at this brilliant moment, as there are limits (or so the wise have said) to the confessions of every debtor ; but, though no mention was made of money borrowed in the old days in England, and though without doubt the list of the later loans was not complete, Paul was astonished at the amount which this improvident person had received from his old friend. The improvident person was pleased with the effect which he produced on his auditor, and to deepen the impression he insisted with delight in such business-like accuracy that Paul should write down the amounts from his dictation.

When this solemn business was ended, Mr. Maidment closed his eyes and lay with a smile of beatitude on his lips, content with his conduct, as if to make a list of debts were equivalent to their payment. But even now he did not remain in that passive state which seemed natural after this unwonted exercise of both conscience and memory. Yet another idea came to the surface. If Philip Brent had lent him money when he wanted it, he would leave the money, which he had won at last, to Philip's son. He had never made a will, and the notion of making one filled him with pleasant excitement : it was a delightful novelty ; it made him fully realize for the first time that he was a man of property. Between him and men of property (solemn and majestic title) there had always



seemed a great gulf. Now the gulf was passed ; he too was the sort of man who sends for his lawyer (the most respectable possession in the world) and makes a will. He was delighted ; his eyes were wide open again, and feverishly bright when he announced to Paul that he proposed to leave him his fortune. "A legacy or two," he said, "you won't mind ; but all the residue of my fortune, of which I die possessed, mines or minerals, messuages, tenements, with their what-d'ye-callem and thingamies, I leave and bequeath to my dear and valued friend Paul Brent, and—and the game is up, and *rien ne va plus*."

He ended with vague mutterings, as if his great ideas had been too much for him. Paul went to him and patted his pillow.

"Never mind about wills and lawyers," he said ; "you must wait till you get to England ; that's the place for lawyers."

"But I shan't get to England," said Mr. Maidment fretfully, but yielding as usual to Paul's authoritative hand. "I shan't get to England," he muttered again sleepily ; and Paul looking down at the wasted face felt with an aching of the heart that the untold story of his father's noble friendship was to be ended here. And he had inherited, as it were, this loyal protecting friendship ; and it was as impossible for him to dally for a moment with the idea of taking a penny of this fortune, which must come to John, as to go in search of his friend and filch the money from his pocket.

While Paul nursed his patient and listened to his

prattle, when he was able to speak, John was growing daily more sick of silence and of idleness. For long hours he had nobody to talk to, and when he had written his budget of letters to England he had nothing to do. He had written to all those who ought to be prepared for the possible arrival of his dilapidated parent; he had written well of the hard life and rough companions which had broken the health and destroyed the beauty of the brilliant Wilfred Maidment. In his anxiety and solitude he had turned to his wife for sympathy, and his letter to her, which ignored their misunderstanding, was eloquent of pity for his father and of affection for her.

It seemed an age before he could receive her answer, and confirm his expectation of her full acceptance of peace and oblivion, of her generous zeal to help and nurse her husband's father. Both to her and to his other correspondents he had hinted at the possibility of wealth; but merely hinted, for here too was a gnawing anxiety. He did not dare to believe that all this money would be his. A silver mine among the topmost peaks of the Rocky Mountains seemed at moments impossible as the treasure of Aladdin; and the more desirable for his career, the more unreal. And then among these wild men, of whom each carried half a dozen lives in a small pocket of his trousers, it seemed to his excited fancy that a mine might be plundered or held by force. He could not understand the calm confidence of Paul, who put the matter aside as if it were safe enough and of no immediate interest. He was only half convinced by

Sam Hall's statement that wealth was safer in Leadville than in New York, and that offenses against sacred property were a thousand times more sure of punishment than offenses against life. But for this security every man must sit on his pile with a small battery beside him—and how then would work be done ?

Sam Hall came up from Colorado Springs as often as he could, and his visits did John good ; he was easy and confident, and brought the latest news of Mr. Sark. And Mr. Sark was another cause of recurring anxiety to John. Of course the man's claim was hollow ; but who could be sure of justice anywhere ? Here in this region, where civilization was but putting forth her first tentative buds, it seemed to John as if the vainest claim might be preferred. But Sam Hall treated with the largest contempt both the claim and the claimant. He generally had something to say about him.

One day he brought a report that Mr. Sark was collecting evidence of a supposed promise of Mr. Maidment that the profits of the hole in the ground, if any, should be shared between them ; and John was not wholly reassured by Sam Hall's grave approval of the value of this testimony, on the ground that there was not one of these witnesses whose oath was not proof positive of the opposite.

On another day the air was electrified by the rumor that the great Sark was on the war-path, breathing whisky and horrid threats of vengeance, fortifying his spirit with ingenious masterpieces of intricate profan-

ity. Sam Hall knew, as John did not know, that Paul had left behind him in Leadville a neat parcel containing Mr. Sark's revolver, having an inborn distaste for another man's property, and being of opinion that, if he were to be shot, he might as well be shot by this pistol as another. That Mr. Sark should go round without a shooting-iron was about as likely as that a game-cock would voluntarily leave his spurs at home. But Sam Hall was skeptical of more shooting, opining that the avenger would decide to leave their crowd alone; and it was not long before he came with a grim smile at the fulfillment of his expectations, and the news that the enemy had climbed down. It is true that the chief still held aloof, majestic in his wrath as Achilles; but Mr. Garbets had come to Mr. Hall on a diplomatic mission to find out if there was still a chance of that two thousand dollars. The diplomatist had been dismissed with contempt, and then at last the chief had appeared in person; and John was vexed when Sam Hall told him that he had sent away the haughty Sark with small hope of the money. John did not rest until the two thousand dollars were paid, and he held a paper signed at the lawyer's office by Mr. Sark, who therein declared that he had not, nor had ever had, any claim whatever on the mine of Mr. Wilfred Maidment. So Mr. Sark went on the drink for a week, and out of the ken of John Maidment, who was glad to think of him no more.

One cause of uneasiness was removed; but causes enough remained for John to review in his lonely

walks and dismal hours of thinking. He was banished from his father's bedside, but his brief glimpses of the sick man and the daily reports kept him in a fever of anxiety. How long would he lie there? When could he be moved? Would he ever be moved? If the mine was his beyond all contention, and was as valuable as they said, would it all belong in time to him, John Maidment? He wanted it so much. If this great chance had never come near him, he would have done well (he rarely doubted that he would do well) without it; but now he had almost grasped a fortune—a fortune in his own control, a great sum of money to use as he thought fit. He felt that he must have it. He had shown people that he was eloquent and clever, and this money would make him a man of weight. He who had all the talents must have these ten talents also, and he would be a leading man at once. Was he sure of this rich heritage? He was made nervous by his father's indifference, and carried as daily companion the constant fear that some part of this wealth, for which he thirsted, would be given away or left to somebody. When he could bear the fear no more in silence he asked Paul if it were not right that his father should make a will; he spoke almost fiercely of his dislike of entering on this subject; he felt that he ought to speak.

This day, on which John relieved his mind by speech, came not long after that on which Wilfred Maidment had expressed his wish to make a will in Paul's favor. Mr. Maidment seemed to have forgotten his wish, and Paul had hoped that he should hear

no more about it. Now he spoke on the subject with decision. He strongly advised John not to bother his father about a will; he declared to him that it would be bad for his patient; he told him shortly that, if his father died and left no will behind, all would go to his son, and that that was clearly the best arrangement. John was glad that he had spoken; in a moment he was in a mood to be generous; he expressed his conviction that his father ought to leave something to Paul's people. Though the subject was distasteful to him, he could not but say to Paul that his poor father had owed much—probably some money and certainly much kindness—to Colonel Brent. Paul looked at John with a frown of perplexity; after a minute he took his old pocket-book out of his breast-pocket, and took from the pocket-book a paper which he handed to John.

"What's this?" asked John sharply, as he looked at the list of figures.

"Your father made me write them down," Paul said; "he says he owes that to my father. When you come into your property, you can offer to pay my father. I think that is fair, and, because it's fair, I think my father will take it."

It would make a very small hole in John's fortune, which was to be; but yet the sight of the figures annoyed him. "Did you know of this before?" he asked crossly.

"I guessed it," said Paul.

"Why was I never told anything?" asked John; it was a familiar line of complaint, and he grew hot

as he spoke. "It was always the same thing ; I was always treated as a child, or a pauper brought up for charity's sake. How could I have borne that charity if I had known that all the time my father was draining him too ?"

"Hush !" said Paul, with a look at the house.

They were so far away that, had John shouted his indignant questions, no hint of them could have reached the ears of the invalid ; but yet Paul hated this talk of "draining" almost as if it were a criticism of his own father. He was growing very tender toward the sick man, whom he had tended so firmly and gently. "Don't talk about it," he said ; "a friend who has must lend to a friend who wants—and you—perhaps you won't have to wait long before you can repay those things."

The words almost stuck in his throat, so loth was he to confess how weak the poor man was. But John was full of words, which still demanded utterance ; he declared that facts were not altered—that right was still right—that it was wrong that he should have been kept in the dark. He grew hotter and more emphatic as he felt the unspoken disapproval of the tall young man, who stood there stiff and with a little more color growing visible in his tanned cheek. John was exasperated ; he remembered with exceeding bitterness how he had mentally criticised his guardian the Colonel for this or that use of his money, for this or that economy ; and how he had always assured himself that his own bringing up was but a small return on the Colonel's part for all the benefit which he

had derived from the friendship of the brilliant Wilfred Maidment. Truly the facts were not altered : the fact was that during all those years, in which Colonel Brent had been paying for John at school and at college, and even when he was a Member of Parliament, he had been sending sums of money across the sea to be wasted in speculation or imbibed in whisky by John's father. And John had not been told, and this was the only aspect of the affair which enabled him to pour forth his deep and effervescing vexation. He was indignant with this old Brent silence, of which he felt that he had always been the victim ; and Paul, erect and speechless in the sunshine, seemed to him the last and not the least annoying embodiment of that incomparable silence.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

No eyes, however kind, could long refuse to see that Wilfred Maidment grew weaker. The American sun was hotter with every day, burning so far away in the wide-arching, cloudless sky, and pouring down its beams of fire through the clear cold air ; but for all its heat it could not give new life to the exhausted man. Without words it came to be understood by all that he would never see again the valley mists and green soft hedges of England. He did not even wish to move. His restless moods were fewer ; even the craving for stimulants which had possessed him now



and then lost strength as he lost strength. He talked less and less, and seemed content to lie dozing or musing with open eyes, quiet in his bed. From the first this clean bed had been so sweet to him that, when Paul lifted him from it that it might be aired and made afresh, he had been always irritable and anxious, till the same strong arms had put him back into the sheets. Clean sheets were a fine luxury, and the greatest of luxuries was rest. Perhaps, lying there with the open eyes staring at the ceiling, he wondered why he had treated himself to so little of this inexpensive repose; he had always been an idle man, and had never found time to rest; it must have seemed strange to him. But he had had some fun in his day. It was certain that he remembered sometimes how well he had amused himself; for Paul, sitting silent by the window, heard now and then a feeble chuckle, which moved his pity more than tears could move it.

One evening Paul, who had been in the sick man's room almost all day, seeing his patient calm and still as the evening, and as indifferent, or so it seemed, to all the troubles of humanity, determined to treat himself to a good night's rest in a fresh room. He saw that everything which the poor man could need was in its place; and when he had seen the nurse established he went away and shut himself in alone and slept. He slept so well that he did not wake till the knocking on his door had grown loud; and then he leaped from the bed, and, going softly to the door, heard from the nurse that Mr. Maidment was restless

and talking wildly, and that she could not quiet him.

After a few minutes Paul was in his patient's room, and, by the faint light which was burning, he saw him moving his head on the pillow and muttering like one in a perplexing dream. Paul bent low over the pillow, and when he raised his head he told the nurse to go for John. A change had come in the sick man which might mean much, and it was right that his son should be there. Now and then his murmurs rose into anxious words, and Paul, standing silent in the stillness, could hear him complain. "We shall be late," he said; "she will have gone; how do I look? Am I all right?" He said the words again and again, till they sank into a sort of sing-song, and then he cried out again with sharp anxiety, "Am I all right? Is my tie straight? Then he laughed feebly—"Ha, ha, ha, la poverina! Does she admire me so much? No, no, no, Carina mia. What will he say? Where is he? Why doesn't he come? How slow he is! There never was anybody so slow. I'm in a devil of a scrape; he always comes when I'm in a scrape—devil of a scrape. Why don't he come?"

"Father!" said John softly, and with a voice full of feeling. He had come in very quietly and gone noiselessly to Paul, who had grasped his hand and given place to him.

"Who are you?" cried out the sick man; "who the devil are you? You're a dun; I know you. Take him away. Philip, why don't you pay him and let him go? Philip!"

Paul started at the sound of his father's name. He had pulled John back into the darkness; for the sick man had made a vain effort to rise as he stared at his son. John turned away with a groan, and his father's voice fell again, calling faintly to the friend of his youth, "Philip, why don't you come to help me?"

Paul could not speak at the moment; this cry to his father seemed to wring his heart; he could only stand by the pillow and lay his large hand on the worn forehead. The touch was enough.

"Ah! ah! yes," the sick man said, "I knew you'd come. God bless you, Philip—dear old Philip—God bless you, Phil!"

To be called to by his father's name sent a strange thrill through Paul's young blood. He tried to speak, but he could only mutter soothing, incoherent words, as he smoothed the pillow and began to tuck in the disordered blankets. The patient submitted quietly, but he spoke again presently in a surprised tone like a child's: "But I haven't said my prayers yet," he said.

God knows to what far day of childhood the poor dook had wandered back. Paul's soothing words were to him the words of the nurse, who had helped to spoil the beautiful child some fifty years ago; and the hands which tucked him in were her hands, which had been motionless almost as long. Paul knelt by the bedside, and repeated the prayer which he had learned, as the poor dook had learned it, at his mother's knee; and, when he had finished, the

dying man said softly for Amen—"God bless you, Phil!"

Paul dropped his face upon the blanket with a sob, and the thin hand moved feebly as if it would touch his hair. It was the dook's last movement, as the name of the loyal friend, who was so far away, was his last word.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE afternoon, some fifteen months or more after Wilfred Maidment's death, Colonel Brent stood erect with his daughter and his eldest son beside him, and looked away across his beloved land. Only a week had gone since he had come back to Brentholme, and his heart had not yet tired of giving silent thanks. Paul stood silent beside his father, and Letty had stopped her talking to her brother, hushed by the peaceful beauty of the scene. It was a September afternoon; it seemed the hush of the year. In the bottom of the valley, where the tiny river wound, the night's mist had never wholly gone; a drowsy air hung on the valley trees, and the smoke moved upward slowly. But on the broad spaces of the park, which lay toward the south and west, the sunshine had spread itself like a garment; the rabbits had crept out on the sunny side of every copse, and a covey of partridges lay quiet on the grass. Where there was an upper growth of coarser grass it was

almost as yellow as the stubble in the fields below ; the elms were flecked with yellow and the beeches tinged with bronze. Over all—over the whole English country of valley and sloping field and free far-rolling down—was a great stillness, in which it seemed that one might hear the downfall of the withered leaf. So listening, one heard the distant twittering of birds, who had gathered in their autumn companies ; from far across the valley the bark of a dog came with a strange distinctness, the crowing of a cock, the echo of a distant gun. The perfect stillness, the familiar beauty of the well-loved place, the thought that they were together and at home, filled the father and his children with a content too deep for words, and a sympathy as deep as the content. In the girl's eyes at least there was a moisture not far from tears.

They had had a wonderful week, but now they had done with the strangeness of the familiar things ; they had packed off the boys to school ; and on this afternoon, for the first time, they seemed to have leisure to stand and look, and to feel that they had come home again. The boys had been an exciting element. They had hung on the heels of their brother from the West, and pestered him with questions ; he had come back to them like a hero from a book of Ballantyne—their own brother and a hero from a book of Ballantyne. They got few romantic tales from Paul, who preferred to tell them of hardships and monotony ; but in spite of this there was a disagreement between Jacky and Teddy as to which of the

two was more fit for the work of a cowboy. It was arranged that Jacky should go to Montana after the next holidays, and see for himself how he liked it. Dicky was to go into the navy, and not even dreams of revolvers and riding all day long could win him for more than a few hours from his longing for a life at sea.

Paul had promised to take Jacky to the West, for he had made up his mind to keep his interest in the ranch. He had suffered from a great disappointment. His only object in going into the cattle business had been to win enough money to make the letting of Brentholme no longer necessary ; he had prospered with his beasts ; he had been very lucky in his partner ; he had looked forward through toilsome days and lonely evenings to the time when he should lead his father home. Now he stood by his father again in the familiar place, but it was no money of his which had brought the thing to pass. He did not wish that his father's return had been delayed till his profits had grown greater ; he had scarce room for anything but joy that Brentholme was freed from the stranger ; yet it had been a great disappointment. He confessed this to Letty, as he would not have confessed it in former days ; but he never told it to the Colonel. John Maidment had paid his father's debt, and Colonel Brent had accepted the payment. He had decided that he could not with justice refuse this payment. John with eager words had spoken of interest for the loans and of compensation for his own bringing-up, for which he declared a passionate gratitude ; but his

guardian had become portentously silent, and a great wave of color had come into his face. His lips had locked themselves so tight that it seemed to John that they would never let out a word again; and when John, having left this silent man, appealed to Paul, Paul told him frankly that he must speak no more on the subject—that it would have been better if he had not spoken about it at all.

Though the money which John paid to Colonel Brent made the return to Brentholme easy, it made no great hole in the young man's new fortune. The mine had been sold in Boston for a large sum; it is a good mine, and, unlike some silver mines, has been profitable to others besides the promoters of the company. It is a good mine, but, nevertheless, John was glad to be out of it; an atmosphere of insecurity seemed to float on the Leadville of his memory. He brought home a large sum to invest in more familiar things; he too was a man with a stake in the country. The very first use which he made of his money was to pay Colonel Brent; and in less than a year the tenant of Brentholme made way for the family. No time was lost in repairs or adornment, and, after a few days of vigorous cleaning and airing, the Colonel was walking up and down the worn pathway in his study carpet, where his father had walked before him. He would have liked to keep Paul forever by his side; but Paul would not, without necessity, put such strict limits to his life. He had gone into cattle-raising with a single purpose, and had been disappointed; but he was now interested in it for itself, for

the wider horizon, for the air of the plains, for the responsibility and the chances of decision and prompt action.

At home there was no work ready to his hand. His father was one of those who manage their own affairs. His zeal for a political life had passed away. He had turned with distaste from politics when John consented to stand for the family borough, and the distaste had not passed away. Much which he had seen, and more which he had heard in America, had weakened his faith in politicians and in political prescriptions for curing the sins and sufferings of mankind. He had thought much for himself in the long solitary hours. To sit silent in Parliament and to vote for the measures, sometimes but blundering compromises, of a party, tempted him as little as a life of race-meetings, or an annual round of country-house visits. A great extension of the franchise was imminent, and he was curious to see how strong the attack on the landlords of the country would be. He hoped with all his heart that in his father's day the coming change would not be great; but still it was no bad thing for the family to have some other form of property than English land. And so there were sufficient reasons which seemed good to Paul why he should stick to the ranch. He had borne the chief burden of its first toilsome days, and now he could leave it for long periods to his partner, whom he could trust as himself. But he meant to go often to his beasts and to the other life, of which they were a part, and he had consented to take his brother Jacky, that he



too might see for himself if that manner of life were to his taste.

The calm of that September afternoon preceded an event which filled the Colonel, Paul, and Letty, when any one of them thought of it, with something like alarm. They were so happy together ; it seemed a pity that they could not have one more of these most lovely autumn days for their own pleasure only. The Colonel put up his chin with a sudden movement, and asked gruffly when John's train was due.

John Maidment was coming to make them a visit with his wife and his baby boy, a nurse, a maid, and a man ; and Letty all the morning had been putting fresh flowers in the rooms, and wishing perhaps that the clean chintzes were not quite so faded. Still, she had whistled as she moved about, and even sung a scrap or two of song, for she was so glad to be pushing about the old furniture in the old rooms. To be at home was joy enough for her, but it was a still greater joy to see Paul there. She smiled whenever she looked at him, even whenever she thought of him ; she told him a great many things, but she did not tell him how great her curiosity was to see John Maidment's wife.

When John Maidment's wife arrived Letty soon decided that she was to be liked. She arrived with her wonderful baby and her suite of attendants, and her husband, who looked a little bored and a little uncomfortable. She was in great force ; she was effusive and emphatic, and she lost no time in proclaiming her love of the Brent family and of their home.

She was immensely pleased with everybody and everything, and with Letty most of all.

On the very first evening after dinner, when they had left the men with their wine, she declared to the girl that she could not imagine how John had grown up in the same house with her without being desperately in love with her.

Letty blushed, though she had not such a gift of blushing as her male relations, and laughed till Lady Gertrude looked at her with surprise. She could laugh at all that; she was glad that she could laugh at all talk of love; she thought that she had left all that a thousand years away, and that she should never look at any other young man when her brother, the best brother in the world, was near. She was thankful that this impulsive lady had not made her embarrassing remark at dinner.

Lady Gertrude thought Letty all the more charming for her blushes and her laughter, and she promptly conferred upon her the highest honor, which, however, she conferred rather liberally on an ungrateful world; she swept her away up-stairs to see her baby. Indeed, Lady Gertrude was so largely happy that her philanthropic heart wished that every one might have a share. She had been very unhappy during her husband's absence in America; she had passed quickly, so soon as she realized that he had gone, from offended dignity to passionate remorse. When she received the affectionate letter, in which he told her of his father's illness, and read in it no word of rebuke, she had been ready to swear that her husband had the finest

nature in the world. When he came home she had rushed into his arms with incoherent confessions of wickedness, and had sobbed upon his shoulder till he almost staggered under her emotion.

She had found John very kind and affectionate ; for indeed he felt rather buffeted and bruised, and found this bounteous gift of love and admiration very much to his taste. And the admiration seemed to last as well as the love, and to admit of as little question. She put him up on a pedestal much higher than that which he had occupied in the first year of their marriage ; and if she ever doubted his perfection, she gave nobody a right to suspect it, except perhaps by a too eager and too defiant assertion of his absolute wisdom and goodness. Indeed, she had found a formula which explained all things to her satisfaction. If anything looked like a blemish, it merely proved that John was a man of genius. The nerves and the tempers of men of genius were not to be judged by the same rules as the nerves and tempers of common men. She was the wife of a man of genius ; his genius required no proof ; everybody was beginning to admit it. Indeed, it is a fact that when John had come back from the wilds with a fortune instead of a father there was much more talk of his extraordinary ability ; and to say that all the world were talking of his talents was a pardonable exaggeration in a wife. Lady Gertrude bragged of her husband ; and then, as a crown of her triumphant happiness, her son was born, and she bragged of her baby. Letty loved her for her enthusiasm and generosity ; and she on her side pro-

claimed that Letty was the sweetest girl that ever lived, and was mightily indignant when Paul laughed.

John was not so comfortable at Brentholme as his wife. The place was too full of memories, which his quick mind could not avoid ; and his head was too full of politics about which he could not speak. He was still member for that moribund little borough at the gates, and, whenever he thought of that fact, he fancied that Paul's clear eyes observed him with disapproval. He could not expatiate on men and measures to these taciturn folk, and he was thinking so much of the future of parties that the silence was almost a pain in the jaws. He was obliged to go away alone, to walk quick, and to mutter convincing arguments and fragments of denunciation. The fragments of denunciation were directed against the Tory party, some members of which had been trying on some of the newest Liberal clothes ; for John had clean forgotten that he had ever thought it possible that he might become a Conservative. Master of a fine fortune of his own, he felt independent forever of all Boucherett influence, and less sensitive to the coolness of Liberal leaders. Moreover, this coolness was a thing of the past ; the chiefs of the party had been uncommonly civil ; perhaps in the ears of even these exalted persons eloquence has a richer sound when it is not the eloquence alone which is golden. This young man could afford to be independent ; he was undeniably clever ; and he had money to spend. John had responded to the advances of his leaders with frankness and with grace. He was confident that the extension of the

franchise would be followed by a decisive Liberal victory at the polls. He was equally confident that, whatever the ingredients of the next Liberal Cabinet might be, it was the Radical section of the party which was the growing power. He was ready to throw in his lot with the Radicals ; he had no doubt that he, with his full pocket and reputation for speaking, would be sought by more than one of the new constituencies ; he meant to choose one where bold opinions and yet bolder language would meet with the fullest sympathy. He remembered the fine flights of his Radical eloquence in the Oxford Union ; he longed for the applause of the crowd and the long roll of the sonorous peroration.

With burning thoughts kept under and with rising words pressed down, it is no wonder that John Maidment was uneasy in the quiet autumn days and with these quiet people. It seemed as if Nature herself had become a member of the Brent family. John was eager for the fray and eager to show his value as a combatant—eager too, of course, to contribute to the welfare of the people. He would have flashed into wrath had any one said that he was less zealous for the good of the nation or of mankind than in the effervescent Oxford days ; but perhaps he would have admitted that he saw more clearly the necessity of belonging to a party and of rising high in its ranks. It was for the good of the nation that he should rise to power ; it was but natural that at present he should be mainly occupied with the study of means of rising. His mind was busy with programmes and with compro-

mises; he wanted the society of those whose minds were busy with these same affairs; he felt a restless desire to discuss, to persuade, to speak. At Brent-holme he went about with a gag in his mouth, until at last in desperation he began to follow his wife to her room, and to pour forth his views and his expectations half to her and half to the window or the ceiling.

Lady Gertrude listened with bountiful admiration, and gave to him almost as much attention as to the baby. To her Boucherett ears some of his talk sounded wild; but she reminded herself that he was a man of genius, and her philanthropic heart was almost ready to believe that, if her husband had his way, the capitalist would lie down with the workman and the Golden age return. Perhaps to the young mother, looking in the face of the first-born, the Golden age was come.

"We ought to get away," said John; "I ought to be where I can talk it over and get at the real moves which are to be made. Here there's not a soul to whom I can speak about these things."

The end of this speech was not quite agreeable to Lady Gertrude; but so placid was she, and so full of admiration, that she made no comment on it save by the smallest sigh, and a hardly perceptible wriggle of the shoulders.

"Of course, darling," she said, "it is very annoying for you. Of course the Brents would not understand you if you talked to them."

"Oh, there's nothing that's hard to understand,"

cried out John impatiently ; “ it isn’t that, and the Brents aren’t fools.”

“ Well, the why—” began Lady Gertrude, but her tone had vexed him, and he broke out impetuously :

“ I do wish you wouldn’t talk of the Brents as if they were wanting. They are extraordinary people, and it’s silly not to see it. Paul saved my life for one thing. Paul is one in a thousand ; he would face any danger, any death for his friend, or his family, or his country—or for mere duty. I tell you that Paul is a wonderful fellow ; I tell you I sometimes feel small beside him and I think him much better than I.”

“ O John,” cried his wife, “ how ridiculous ! You know how I like the Brents ! They are so nice and natural, but there are thousands of people like that. Of course they are brave and good and all that, but so are lots of Englishmen. There is only one John Maidment.”

John laughed and touched her lightly on the cheek. He laughed, as if her words were absurd, but he liked their sound—“ There is only one John Maidment.”

THE END.











